STORIES FROM BROWNING

F. M. HOLLAND

with Introduction by

Mrs. Orr.

BOMBAY BRANCH

OF THE

Royal Asiatic Society.

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BY

FREDERIC MAY HOLLAND,

AUTHOR OF

'THE REIGN OF THE STOICS.'

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WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY

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CONTENTS.

	PAGE
PREFACE	vii
INTRODUCTION	xi
STRAFFORD	1
SORDELLO	19
LURIA	39
THE ADVENTURES OF BALAUSTION	56
A BLOT IN THE 'SCUTCHEON	79
THE RING AND THE BOOK	98
PIPPA PASSES	151
THE RETURN OF THE DRUSES	172
COLOMBE'S BIRTHDAY	205

PREFACE.

To lovers of Robert Browning—and all who read him are such—it may seem impertinent to offer these little stories.

The unfortunate fact is, and herein lies their excuse, that very few, even thoughtful, persons, do read Browning. One rarely finds, among the many who condemn him as obscure, a single man or woman who is familiar with his simple poems, like 'Evelyn Hope,' 'Instans Tyrannus,' and 'Saul,' so full of lyrical inspiration; his pure poetic conceptions, like 'Prospice' and 'Natural Magic;' or his deeply religious ones, like 'Rabbi Ben Ezra' and 'Death in the Desert.'

To those who have found each successive volume, as it issued from the press, to contain so many elements of spiritual growth, or to mark the milestones of their best experience, this would seem incredible were it not so common.

No attempt has been made in these stories to criticise him, but, simply dropping all extraneous matter, to reproduce, as much in his own words as possible, the motive of some of his poems. Six stories have been

taken from the Dramas, which will always be the most popular of his longer poems, on account not only of nobleness of sentiment, but vigorous dramatic action. A few words of historical explanation have been occasionally prefixed, as in the 'Return of the Druses.' The other three stories are from the narrative poems; 'Sordello' being chosen, not only because it stands so much in need of interpretation, but because it is so well worth interpreting. 'Aristophanes' Apology' has been selected for both these reasons, and is rendered in connexion with that earlier adventure of Balaustion which is the subject of one of his most charming later poems. The remaining story is simply condensed from the 'Ring and the Book,' one of the most wonderful poems ever written, whether from its argumentative power, the depth of its logic, or its touching pathos.

Many of his finer and shorter ones could not endure even this slight handling. They are too complete as works of art, and also too subtle, to bear a single touch. 'By the Fireside,' for instance, and 'Childe Roland to the Dark Tower came,' each a perfect chrysolite, and so vivid with the deepest facts of life that it seems profane even to lay a finger on them. The same may be said of some of his longer ones, like 'James Lee' and 'La Saisiaz,'—the one filled with subtle thought which comes like faint flashes of dawn, and the other a most mature and finished argument, on a high plane of thought, most

fitly placed in its Alpine setting. Indeed, all his poems are so full of close analysis as well as imaginative creation, that they more than repay the most thorough study; to secure which is the object of these stories, published now in the firm conviction, that the time will come, when the complete recognition of Browning will have ceased to be a prophecy.

INTRODUCTION.

THIS little volume of Stories from Browning is made up on the pattern of Lamb's *Tales from Shakespeare*, and was probably suggested by them; and its author must have discovered, at a very early stage, that he had undertaken a difficult task; for the resemblance between Browning and Shakespeare stops at the very point at which the common treatment has been applied. As poets, they are united by their insight into all that is permanent in human life. As dramatists, they are separated by the whole extent of the social change which our country has undergone between the sixteenth century and the present day; and the most substantial result of the change is this: that a great dramatic poet could be a teller of stories in Shakespeare's time, and cannot be so now. The amount of action and incident through which Shakespeare's deepest conceptions came to light have no modern equivalent but in the sensation play or the pantomime; and even when Mr. Browning's play is strongest in plot and incident, its real drama is internal. With Shakespeare, the story of a play is an outline of it; with Browning, it is a bare skeleton; and this brings us to what constitutes the greatest difficulty of Mr. Holland's attempted work. He was obliged to clothe his skeletons;

it was probably a matter of conscience with him to do it as much as possible in Mr. Browning's own words ; and as these words are of the language of modern poetry, which is poetic in feeling as well as rhythmic in form, they must either jar on the tone of a simple narrative, or force the narrative into a halting agreement with themselves. If, in the face of all this, Mr. Holland had only told the stories of Mr. Browning's plays, in which the idea is bound up with the words, and in which there is nothing to explain, and little or nothing which it is desirable to omit, his exertions would, we think, have been misapplied. But Mr. Browning has given us some chapters in human experience which are not in the form of plays; in which the idea can be separated from the words, and which leave a good deal to be explained ; and Mr. Holland has done much to recommend his plan, by including in it an abridged prose version of the most important of these. Such a treatment can no more do justice to 'Sordello,' 'The Ring and the Book,' and 'Aristophanes' Apology,' than it does to 'Strafford' and 'Luria;' but it helps the reader who has not unlimited time and knowledge to devote to these poems, to do justice to them for himself; and in this respect almost every step of the process has brought clear gain. Mr. Holland has done least for us in the case of 'Sordello,' in which he picks his way by the historical stepping-stones, never trusting himself very far into its speculative or poetic depths. Even this, however, constitutes helpful guidance in a narrative, of which the outward events are almost as puzzling as the internal.

The difficulties of this work have not been much over-

rated. It was written when its author was very young, and his artistic judgment not yet on a level with his imagination. This was not so apparent in 'Paracelsus,' which requires careful reading, but will always repay it; and seems at first sight to be the work of an older rather than a younger man. 'Sordello' shows in reality an advance on 'Paracelsus,' both in wealth of imagination and in the power of grappling with the deepest problems of thought; but in 'Paracelsus,' the author was working at something outside himself; in 'Sordello,' he was more clearly depicting his own inmost experiences; and those experiences had a language of their own, which he had no idea of adapting to other people's minds. The intricate thought took an involved expression, and he did not see the necessity of breaking it up; and when, many years later, he wished to break it up, he found this to be impossible: re-writing the poem would have been re-casting it. So youthful a production did not seem to him worth the labour; and those who value the first-fruits of so powerful a genius will be glad that he abstained from any improvements, in which this earlier freshness must have disappeared. Even then he imagined the historic details of the story to be much less perplexing than they are: for he speaks of them, in the Preface to his later edition, as merely forming a background; whereas they are the subject of constant digressions, and assume a knowledge of the times in which Sordello lived, which a reader not primed for the occasion is very unlikely to possess. Mr. Browning has done the best for us which his judgment allowed, by heading the pages of his poem, so as to give a running index of their principal contents. Mr. Holland's

summary of these contents is a further attempt at simplifying them.

The first stumbling-block he has had to remove is the anticipation of the central scene of the story—that in which Sordello and Palma come to an understanding with each other. This scene is so full of dramatic contrast and artistic effect, that we can understand Mr. Browning's employing it as he does, as an opening picture, which melts away as soon as it has done its work on the reader's mind, to reappear when the proper moment has come; and it is very usual with him to begin a narrative by some statement of fact which actually or figuratively contains it as in a nutshell, so that our minds are worked up as we read, by a haunting half-consciousness of what is coming, which detracts in no way from our surprise or interest when it does come. What he has done in the case of Sordello is more simple than this, and amounts to little more than the novelist's device for laying hold of his reader's sympathy from the beginning; but in novels we have never any difficulty in recognising the opening scene, when we are led up to it again through a chapter or a volume, as the case may be, and have often no time to lose sight of it; whereas, in 'Sordello' we have plenty of time to lose sight of it, and are farther put off the track by re-entering it, as it were, through a different door; so that the very passages which prove its identity are apt to escape our notice. This defect might have been remedied by a stroke of the pen, and his failing to remedy it was a mark of literary inexperience on the author's part. Mr. Holland has done so in a simple manner by beginning his story after the Introduction, and transferring one or

two descriptive touches from the latter into the former; and with this help, the student of the poem will not only follow its course more easily, but read the right meaning into the strange historic and romantic vision which its opening pages conjure up. Mr. Browning begins by announcing that for once he will tell his story from behind the scenes, and act as showman instead of spectator to the character he has brought upon the stage. He then marshals an imaginary audience, gathered from both the living and the dead; and last, by a stroke of his poetic wand,

> . The past is hurled
> In twain: up-thrust, out-staggering on the world,
> Subsiding into shape, a darkness rears
> Its outline, kindles at the core, appears
> Verona . . . .'

The news has just come that her prince, Count Richard of Saint Boniface, has been entrapped into Ferrara by the Ghibelline leader Salinguerra, and the whole city is flying to arms. Her magistrates are debating in Count Richard's palace, but the citizens have crowded into the market-place. We see them all with their quick gestures and hurried tones; the cross-fire of exclamation and allusion, of question and reply, which flashes from one to the other—the tide of warlike and patriotic passion surging and swaying in the red light of the autumnal setting sun; and side by side with this, the little tapestried chamber, its darkness, its silence, and the mysterious stolen interview which is transforming Sordello's life. We recognise, even without help, that that interview was critical; but Mr. Browning would have forestalled the

event too much, if he had told us at once what the nature of the crisis was: how Palma's whispered words were sweeping away every landmark of Sordello's past years, throwing out strange hints of the mystery and greatness of his birth; and teaching him that he, her minstrel and servant, had been in truth her master—the guiding influence of her soul.

It may be useful to future readers of the poem itself to supplement the story by a few remarks on the spirit and on the lesson of Sordello's life, as the completed narrative conveys it to us. Mr. Browning starts from the conception of a refined, beauty-loving, and susceptible nature, which he poetically compares to a sun-warmed, southern land, in a passage from page 19, which Mr. Holland has quoted; and he goes on to depict two separate forms in which this nature is found. Its possessors are alike on one point: they have a constant craving to bury themselves in what they admire; they long to be one with it—and we may add that although this expresses a very deep and poetical truth, that truth is also a very familiar one. I do not suppose any one has ever deeply admired a beautiful thing without longing to lay hold of it in some closer and more intimate manner than consists in merely looking at a landscape or smelling a flower; and this holds good for imaginative children as well as for grown-up people. But the two different beauty-lovers are distinguished by this: that the one seems to lose himself in the things he admires, and is self-forgetting; and the other seems to find himself in them, and is egotistical. Both men are disposed to lead dreamy, inactive lives; but the one is inactive because

his love of the beautiful becomes a worship which fills his life; the other, because he is constantly dreaming of a rich and many-sided existence which will make him more worthy to be worshipped. The reverential mood is thus described at page 20:—

> 'Nor rest they here; fresh births of beauty wake
> Fresh homage, every grade of love is past,
> With every mode of loveliness: then cast
> Inferior idols off their borrowed crown
> Before a coming glory. Up and down
> Runs arrowy fire, while earthly forms combine
> To throb the secret forth; a touch divine—
> And the scaled eyeball owns the mystic rod;
> Visibly through his garden walketh God.'

The self-asserting mood is illustrated by Sordello's career; and we are told at the outset that it will be so. At pages 22 and 23 we find Mr. Browning saying, in the name of an imaginary public:—

> 'In truth? Thou hast
> Life, then—wilt challenge life for us: our race
> Is vindicated so, obtains its place
> In thy ascent, the first of us; whom we
> May follow, to the meanest, finally,
> With our more bounded wills?'

Then in his own:—

> 'Ah, but to find
> A certain mood enervate such a mind,
> Counsel it slumber in the solitude
> Thus reached nor, stooping, task for mankind's good
> Its nature just as life and time accord.'

In Sordello's words :—

'— Too narrow an arena to reward
Emprize—the world's occasion worthless since
Not absolutely fitted to evince
Its mastery!' . . . .

And again in his own person :

'Or if yet worse befall,
And a desire possess it to put all
That nature forth, forcing our straitened sphere
Contain it,—to display completely here
The mastery another life should learn,
Thrusting in time eternity's concern,—
So that Sordello . . . .
Fool, who spied the mark
Of leprosy upon him, violet-dark
Already as he loiters? . . . .'

This passage gives a clue with which we may thread the intricacies of Sordello's mental life; and if we hold firmly to it, it will guide us to the end; though we can never lose the feeling that we are, more or less, on puzzling and problematic ground; for Sordello's state can only appear real to the few persons who have passed through it themselves, and the few more who can enter into abstruse conditions of feeling which they have not passed through. We all know what it is to feel our mind enervated by reflecting on the difficulties of life, or even our sympathies paralysed by the hopeless spectacle of its sufferings. We all think sometimes of the good we might do if our existence could be prolonged, or some present impediment could be swept away; but this is only another

way of saying that circumstances are too strong, or that the world is too big for us. It is quite another thing to put oneself in the place of a man who feels his powers too big for the world; and it is only a young or very imaginative man who could be deceived by such a sensation. It is all this which makes us believe that in describing Sordello Mr. Browning was in great measure describing himself; and it is interesting to note that he was always so far ahead of the poet of his creation as to make himself his mouthpiece and judge him at the same time. Even in his earliest work his poetic imagination and his practical reason went hand in hand.

The key-note of Sordello's mental nature is, therefore, its ambition; and this ambition is that of a man who has grown up without duties, without discipline, without knowledge of life; with imperious instincts, and with a power of imagination which seemed competent to gather all existences into his own. And first his fancy plays innocently enough among natural things, clothing them in his attributes, and him in theirs; but soon he wants a more imposing existence, and a public to admire it; so he drops the trees and flowers, and brings to life all the painted and sculptured figures which the castle supplies; and in his fantastic way identifies himself with them. The next step is to improve on their existence, as history or legend represents it, and to be those very persons, only greater, more beautiful, and more successful than they. And lastly, he floats upwards from the world of human heroes and kings, to become the superhuman embodiment of strength and beauty—Apollo himself. And Apollo has his imaginary court of Delian

maidens, which thins away by degrees, and leaves him face to face with the vision of a beautiful and living woman, but whom he has only once seen. This woman is Palma, daughter of Eccelino Romano, and step-daughter of Adelaide, to whose retinue Sordello belongs. Palma is henceforward Sordello's ideal love; that is to say, she is the woman by whom the Apollo in him is to be loved and worshipped.

And meanwhile, his vanity and his ambition are sickening for more real food, though he scarcely knows that they are:

> . . . . 'Lean he grows and pale,
> Though restlessly at rest.'

Perhaps, too, the human heart in him is craving to be filled. The preponderance in his dreams of the one female form seems to point to this; and if, at that juncture, the young beauty of Palma had come to him in the form of some obscure maiden, free to challenge his affection and to return it, his story might have ended where it begins. But this was not to be. Palma chooses him as her minstrel—by what chance Mr. Holland has told us; and he determines that henceforth his whole being shall utter itself in song. Song will be the outlet he has longed for, and the means of power of which he has stood in need. It is here that his first great lesson awaits him. Song is a living power to those only whose life it can absorb; and Sordello's art is a means, and not an end. His life is not in his song, but in that spiritual dominion to which it is to open the way; and in the striving after this, there are two beings in him, incessantly thwarting

each other: the poet who cannot lend himself to the emotions of common men, and the man whose self-consciousness forbids his losing himself in the unselfish enthusiasm of the poet. He has no point of contact with the human existences which he desires to subject to his own. He succeeds at first by a kind of fluke: a sudden burst of inspiration has lifted him over the head of Eglamor, and the fickle people are only too glad to give him Eglamor's place. He retains their suffrages for a time by the simple fact of singing Eglamor's songs. He is content for a time to sing of the pains and pleasures, of the virtues and vices, which his hearers understand, and is rewarded by the interest with which he inspires them. But he is too blind fully to understand his success. Having done so much, ambition leaps up again, and asks why he should not do more—why he should reproduce the mere passing moods which are the rags and tatters of existence, instead of seeking to present himself to the multitude in a succession of living wholes. But a living whole is not to be expressed in words; and he struggles with the deficiencies of language only to find that they are hopeless: for words can only build up piecemeal, by means of separate ideas, the complex but single impressions which he wishes to convey. They are to him, not an elastic garment, which takes the form of his thoughts, but a coat of armour, which breaks to pieces under their strain—

> 'Piece after piece that armour broke away,
> Because perceptions whole, like that he sought
> To clothe, reject so pure a work of thought
> As language: thought may take perception's place

But hardly co-exist in any case,
Being its mere presentment—of the whole
By parts, the simultaneous and the sole
By the successive and the many. . . .'

Sordello and his audience are soon at complete cross-purposes with each other. He will not renounce his power, so 'he declines from his ideal,' and works for the success of the moment, which, in its turn, forsakes him. He cannot raise his hearers to his own level, so he sinks to theirs; sometimes swinging himself aloft on his broken wings, but always sinking again; swaying wearily between the ideal which he does not know how to clothe, and the real which he does not know how to inspire; always missing the level of the average human soul. Naddo, the Italian equivalent for Jones or Brown, is always at hand, with his shallow common-sense, to rub into him his mistakes, and just miss the right way of advising him out of them. At last, every fountain of song dries up within his brain, and he throws up his occupation in despair.

Eglamor represents the opposite type. He is the gentler being, created to worship and not to rule—one 'who belongs to what he loves;'—and who, loving his art, is rewarded by it. He is the undivided man, in whom the poetic and the human nature are at one; and with all his enjoyment of the power of song, he is so free from the spirit of self-assertion, that he does not resent his dethronement in it. The disgrace breaks his heart, but he can kiss the hand of his successful rival, and drop a tear upon it, before he goes home to die. The simple beauty with which Mr. Browning invests this character is a mark of preference so far as it goes; yet he makes it no

less clear that this harmony of the artist's life, this oneness of the singer and the song, is incompatible with the highest form of art. He does not vindicate the egotism of Sordello's poetic dreams; but he calls his visionary creations—'works which will be never more than dreamed'—'true work'—from the artistic point of view. He thinks Sordello the truer poet of the two, because the singer in him is always beyond the song—the striving greater than the result; and because the striving was, with all its selfishness, of no earthly kind. All this may seem to jar on the intended moral of the story; but it does not really do so; and we have the whole range of Mr. Browning's mature thought to assist the interpretation. He always admits the practical wisdom of not flying too high; and the sliding-scales in which he weighs all finite existence, put a definite value on even mediocre work; but his deeper philosophy is one of aspiration, and not of fulfilment; and he has nowhere expressed this so simply, and so strongly at the same time, as in the dramatic lyric—'Old Pictures in Florence.' In this poem he imagines himself as contemplating the unfinished Campanile, and while so doing he reminds the spirit of its constructor that the only perfect thing he ever did was a thing not worth the doing: an 'O' which he drew at a single stroke, to show his mechanical mastery of his art.

But the contact with so many commonplace existences has done its work on Sordello's mind; and when a year of rest and contemplation among the woods of Goito has restored its balance, the truth comes home to him that in his craving for supremacy he has been all along mistaking the shadow for the substance; the abstractions

of life for its realities. He has tried to live by the brain alone, and to reach the hearts of others by means of it; and by doing this he has failed in his ministry, and missed his happiness as a man. His moral sense is not so far aroused as to reproach him for having done nothing for the good of others; but his practical sense shows him why he has done no good to himself. He has spun dreams of action, and he has been inactive—of adventure, and he has ventured nothing—of love, and he has never loved, or been loved; and now his opportunities are gone—his youth is past—and the fragile body so worn by the slow fever of a purposeless existence, that it is ready to fail him at the first shock of a real challenge to life. It is in this state that the summons to Verona, and to Palma's presence, finds him.

There is something very shadowy about the relation of these two characters to each other. The story, as Mr. Browning relates it, is almost exclusively the history of a soul; and we miss in it some links of practical circumstance which would make its course more clear. It would seem natural that Sordello should have come into occasional contact with Palma during the years which he passed as her singer, or the earlier period in which they must have lived under the same roof—and that the human side of his nature should, in some degree, have centred, and developed itself in her; and failing that, we should like to know how nothing of the kind came to pass. We do know, however, that Mr. Browning did not mean him to love in any human sense of the word. We are reminded that he 'would fain have led nature captive' in the same sentence in which we are told of Palma's

subjection to him; and even Palma's subjection is depicted as no common feeling, but as the enslavement to a stronger will and a higher soul than her own; though it begins with her first glimpse of Sordello in the mysterious maple-chamber, and grows up like the natural romance of a lonely girl's life. It is the yearning for a spiritual completeness through which the higher destinies of both are to be fulfilled. The revelation of his high birth and Ghibelline antecedents points out the way; and her energy in turning the opportunity to account suggests the idea that if he had lived to become her husband, she would have proved the master-spirit, and their relative positions would have been reversed. He is even made to say on one occasion that '*he trusts to her for manhood.*'

The last three books of the poem exhibit the growth of Sordello's moral, as also of his practical nature; beginning with his and Palma's joint entrance into Ferrara, and his first experience of a state of war. There is no break in his life; no sudden regeneration. The craving for enlarged existence simply melts into a less selfish and more rational form. He passes almost insensibly from the desire of absorbing other lives into his into that of losing himself in them. His spirit would still impose itself on mankind; but for mankind's sake, no longer for his own. At first he is startled to find what a nearly dead level human life presents; and then comes the second step in his progress. He sees that it is the dead level of humanity which claims his help and his sympathy; and the longer he looks, the more the exceptional few seem to owe their greatness to their connexion with the common lot.

'And yet the people grew, the people grew,
Grew ever, as if the many there indeed,
More left behind and more who should succeed,—
Simply in virtue of their mouths and eyes,
Petty enjoyments and huge miseries,—
Mingled with, and made veritably great
Those chiefs. . . . . .'

But this dream of a nobler and gentler happiness remains also unfulfilled. Taurello Salinguerra, not knowing that Sordello is his son, laughs at the rhapsodies which he pours out before him, and would probably have sent the strange poet, with the new-born soul and the prematurely enfeebled body, about his business; but he sees that Palma loves her ministrel; and half seriously, half in joke, he flings round him the badge which denotes the headship of the Ghibelline cause. Sordello begs to be left to fight out this first and last fight between conscience and opportunity, alone; we know the end. In this hour of supreme conflict his mental vision becomes clear.

'His truth, like yonder slow moon to complete
Heaven, rose again, and naked at his feet,
Lighted his old life's every shift and change.'

And he knows that all his failures have proceeded from the want of a purpose in harmony with his life, and yet external to it. The same truth tells him that a great purpose lies before him now. He may reject the promise of wealth and power, and devote himself to the failing cause—the cause of the people's good. But this purpose involves a sacrifice; and the sophistry of self-interest goes over the ground again, and disputes it inch by inch. Is not his nature too large to be absorbed by a single motive?

and if not, what motive is worthy to absorb it? The people's good? But no good is absolute! Every gain is fraught with loss; every loss with gain! There could be no virtue without trial; sympathy is only aroused by suffering. What good is possible must be realised by each man for himself. And besides this: the people's interest is in the future; his is in the present. Surely the two may be reconciled; surely the one might be made even to advance the other. Who loses by his gain of present happiness? Above all, who would profit by his loss?

> 'Our world (I labour to extract the pith
> Of this his problem) grew, that even-tide,
> Gigantic with its power of joy, beside
> The world's eternity of impotence
> To profit though at his whole joy's expense.'

And then the sophistry breaks down—nature throws off the mask—and the whole man bursts forth in an almost delirious cry, for that full, deep draught of human existence which he has barely tasted, and which, living or dying, he feels himself called upon to renounce.

> . . . . . 'Oh life, life-breath,
> Life-blood,—ere sleep, come travail, life ere death!
> This life stream on my soul, direct, oblique,
> But always streaming! Hindrances? They pique:
> Helps? Such . . . . . .'

The mood raves itself out, and the conflict revives, but on other ground:—

> 'Life! Yet the very cup whose extreme dull
> Dregs, even, I would quaff, was dashed, at full,
> Aside so oft; the death I fly, revealed

So oft a better life this life concealed,
And which sage, champion, martyr, through each path
Have hunted fearlessly—the horrid bath,
The crippling-irons and the fiery chair.'

Yes! it was well for them. They believed in something stronger than life. For him, there is nothing so strong as the sense of his own existence. They believed in an absolute right. Is not rather all right and wrong, as all truth and falsehood, all beauty and all ugliness, in the circumstance which makes, or in the eye which sees it? . . . We may imagine it is here that conscience makes its final rally, and the badge of this world's greatness is cast under Sordello's feet.

As the dark waters of death rise higher about his soul the last lesson of his earthly life takes shape within him, and he sees the practical, as bound up with the moral reason of his defeat. Mr. Browning takes up the note which he struck in the opening pages of his story, when he told us that Sordello's nature was tainted with the lust of more than mortal dominion, and that it would be his doom.

'The leprosy confirmed and ruinous
To spirit lodged in a contracted house!'

It has been his doom. He has rebelled against the limits of human existence, and they have conquered him. He has strained his body to the exclusive purposes of the soul, and death has been the result. He has broken the bond of fellowship which decrees that body and mind shall be to each other as the reflected starry heaven and the reflecting starlit water; as the mingled splendours of an angel's folded wings.

But how is this fellowship to be maintained? Mr. Browning could clothe it in very beautiful images; but it is not really beautiful to his imagination; for it means to him the temporary subjection of that which is created to rule. His philosophy admits of no true equality between body and mind. Therefore, as we have seen, he is full of sympathy with the failures, and of pity for the sins of aspiration; and he does not leave us even here without pointing a way of escape to the poor captive soul, with the 'muffled eyes' which dare not see beyond the flesh. This way of escape is LOVE. Guided by love the soul may

> '. . . . . see All
> —The Great Before and After, and the Small
> Now, yet be saved by this the simplest lore,
> And take the single course prescribed before,
> As the king-bird with ages on his plumes
> Travels to die in his ancestral glooms.'*

And we know, from the concluding paragraph, that the love which selects that course for man to follow in is CHRIST.

Has Sordello found the way at last? And does he meet the gentle spirit of Eglamor in that central truth, towards which the soul of power, and the soul of love, were travelling, each from his different starting-point? The answer is lost in death; but so much Mr. Browning means us to feel, that where the spirit of Love and the spirit of Power meet, *there* is the central truth. They are the two eagles which, in the ancient fable, went two ways about the world, and

* I suppress a note of interrogation, which belongs to the different manner in which the idea is introduced.

'where, in the midst, they met,
Though on a shifting waste of sand, men set
Jove's temple.'

Mr. Holland devotes quite half of a 'note' appended to his story, to a criticism of the preference for the Guelf side, which he thinks the poem displays; and after reminding his readers of the various points in which Frederic the Second promoted the cause of humanity, and the popes of his own and the preceding centuries delayed it, he says: 'No wonder that the keen-sighted and patriotic Dante took sides with the emperors against the temporal power of the popes. So in fact did the historic Sordello; for there really was a poet of this name, as will be seen . . . . .' That there *was* a poet of this name is sufficiently attested by Mr. Browning himself, at page 15; where he speaks of him as the 'forerunner' of Dante, the 'herald-star' which Dante's consummate brightness has absorbed; and he not only thus states his actual existence and relative literary position, but describes, later on, the services rendered by him to the Italian language. The conflict waged with it by the imaginary Sordello, who found his native tongue inadequate to the expression of his thoughts, only conveys the recorded belief that he 'created' it. In these facts Mr. Browning's historic conscience may certainly rest. The mystery of Sordello's birth, life, and death, justified any dramatic conception of him whatever; and a worse cause than that of the popes and barons might have been supposed to commend itself to him at a moment when its enemies were revelling in all the cruelties of reprisal, and when the united rising of twenty Lombard cities had rendered it, at least for

that moment, national. But Mr. Browning's Sordello is scarcely more Guelf than Ghibelline. He thinks both factions condemned alike by their narrowness. He says to Palma,

> . . . . . 'Azzo, too,
> Supports a cause: what cause? Do Guelfs pursue
> Their ends by means like yours; or better?'

And Mr. Browning continues,—

> 'When
> The Guelfs were proved alike, men weighed with men
> And deed with deed, blaze, blood, with blood and blaze,
> Morn broke: "Once more, Sordello, meet its gaze
> "Proudly—the people's charge against thee fails
> "In every point, while either party quails:
> "These are the busy ones: be silent thou!
> "Two parties take the world up, and allow
> "No third, yet have one principle, subsist
> "By the same injustice; whoso shall enlist
> "With either, ranks with man's inveterate foes.
> "So there is one less quarrel to compose:
> "The Guelf, the Ghibelline may be to curse—
> "I have done nothing, but both sides do worse
> "Than nothing . . . . ."'

And when a chance occurrence has suddenly flashed into his mind the thought that

> . . . . . 'Rome's the Cause!
> Rome of the Pandects, all the world's new laws—'

Rome is to him neither papal nor imperial, neither Guelf nor Ghibelline, but simply the mother-city; the embodiment of a great historic, progressive, and constructive force, in the 'reintegration' of which may be 'typified the triumph of mankind.' This feeling for something not only higher than self, but larger and nobler than a party, is,

the distinguishing moral note of Sordello's later life, the sign of his conversion. His final conflict is waged less against the temptations of a bad cause than against those of an exclusive, and also a triumphant one; and for this reason there is special interest in the digression which concludes the third book, though we must agree with Mr. Holland that it is rather bewildering to be sent flapping again on the wings of Mr Browning's imagination, just when we fancy we are sitting down to rest in the beautiful restful city, in which he is supposed to be. One passage especially shows a yearning tenderness for the weaknesses and sorrows of humanity, which was almost required to explain the special quality of the poem: the equal justice with which it treats the claims of universal brotherhood, and the exactions of a self-conscious personal existence. The story of Sordello is perhaps the one case on record of poetic egotism both depicted and judged by a poet, at what is usually the most poetic and also the most egotistic stage of a man's career.

In 'The Ring and the Book' Mr. Holland has found a less difficult subject, and his patience has been rewarded by a more complete result. The breadth of handling which constitutes the great power and originality of this work presents itself to a hurried or desultory reader as mere tiresome lengthiness or repetition; and reducing it to a simple narrative was the best way of arousing the interest and the attention which are required for following it to the end. Mr. Holland was also fortunate in being able to tell the greater part of the story in the language of the two actors in it whose truthfulness is patent from the first; since the version thus supplied

gives the strongest relief to both the poetic and the judicial aspect of the case. The purity of motive revealed by Pompilia's and Caponsacchi's defence covers all that is ambiguous in their act, and yet forbids any attempt to conceal it. We acknowledge the endless doubts and speculations to which it must have given rise, and understand how possible it was to condemn the murder, and still believe in the existence of some real provocation to it. And when we turn from the story to the book itself, and see how each speaker, single or collective, apparently exhausts all that can be said on the subject, and the next reopens it from the beginning, the very lengthiness of the work becomes an excitement, and its repetitions assume the force of novelty.

There is something, however, in the Pope's soliloquy which could only be given in a fuller reproduction of it, and is at the same time needed for its appreciation; and that is, the mental conflict under which it is carried on. The main facts of his argument are sufficient to show that he is summing up the case against the Count and his accomplices; but they are not sufficient to make us feel that he is also summing it up against himself; that he is accumulating facts in order to stifle that shrinking from the necessary verdict, which is so natural in a very old man, weighed down by the responsibilities of his office, and already face to face with the Judgment to which his sinful fellow-creatures are to be consigned. They do not show that each new evidence of the blackness of the crime comes to him as a sense of relief, by proving its remission the more impossible; and that when he utters the sentence of death, it is with the feeling of having

ged from a supreme conflict which has exhausted fa- las strength. It is this which gives its pathetic power to what would otherwise be chiefly curious as a ninth or tenth re-statement of the one series of facts; and we may add that nothing in 'The Ring and the Book' displays the author's genius more triumphantly than the moral touch by which he has thus ennobled the weakness of old age. It is so true to nature, though so often belied by her.

'The Adventures of Balaustion' is useful in displaying the natural sequence which unites two works of Mr. Browning's,—the one simple and popular, the other chiefly written for students; and those numerous readers of 'Balaustion's Adventure' who have been repelled by the title of 'Aristophanes' Apology,' or by the first dip into its contents, will be surprised to find how much the Rhodian woman and her reverence for Euripides have to do with it. Mr. Holland does not give a sketch of the 'Herakles' of this great dramatist as he did of his 'Alcestis;' and it is well on its own account that he did not, as it would have suffered more by the process; but this omission is also justified by the fact that Balaustion's first adventure is only a setting to the transcribed play, whereas the real interest of what Mr. Holland calls her second is independent of it. Herakles and its beauties form part of Balaustion's attack on Aristophanes; but Aristophanes is there to defend himself; and Mr. Browning has given him more flesh and blood, than to almost any man or woman of his creation. Balaustion is only intended to draw him out, by alternately appealing to his higher self, and trying to convict him of the lower. She

also is human in her pride and pleasure in her husband, of whom we do not quite know whether he has loved her for Euripides' sake, or Euripides for hers; and it seems natural to see her transformed from the ardent girl, who poured forth the sorrows of Alcestis on the temple steps, to a dignified matron displaying the tokens of her poet's esteem and gratitude, among her household gods; still we feel sure that she represents the abstract rights of the case rather than any living exponent of them, and that Mr. Browning has made her a 'foreigner' that she may not seem less living still; since a young Athenian wife of Euripides' day would not have thought of him as an object of worship, and would scarcely have been competent to discuss him as such, if she had. Mr. Holland's semi-quotations give a good idea of the personal appearance of Aristophanes, and mark out some of the main points of his defence; but no mere sketch can convey a just impression of the mixed nature of the man, and of the opposite moods which chase each other in his mind (as Balaustion describes them) like the effects of cloud and sunshine upon the sea. It is the historic Aristophanes whom Mr. Browning has put before us, half drunk as he so frequently was; with his genius at once brilliant and obscene; his 'Tory' prejudices, and his unscrupulous pandering to the lowest popular delight; but he has also imagined him as shaken and excited by an unusual conflict of feeling. The news of Euripides' death, and the solemn tribute announced by Sophocles to his memory, have burst in on the orgy by which his theatrical triumph was being crowned; and the truth which is in wine, with the generosity of which no poet

nature can be devoid, has flashed up in one moment's reverent and perhaps remorseful regret for his departed rival. His comic crew mistake the sentiment; they stifle it by their mirth; and in the combined shock and reaction, he staggers off to Balaustion's house and 'has it out' with her and with himself. The difficulty of understanding his 'apology' does not lie in any abstruseness of its arguments, as in the case of Sordello, but in their realism. It is full of allusions to local jokes and practices and to persons concerned in them, which affect the average reader very much as the chaff of our Society papers might affect a Frenchman or German a hundred or more years hence; and the whole nature of Aristophanes is bound up in his way of bringing them in. If the conception of Sordello needs pruning down, that of the Greek poet requires all its building up, and every sentence which falls from him, in his mental writhings and plungings, is a self-revealing, whether intended or not, of the great, reckless, triumphant genius, which the voice of conscience has suddenly brought to bay.

The suggested advent of a great British poet, who will terminate the feud between tragedy and comedy, by uniting both characters in himself, loses something of its point, by being imputed to Balaustion, as the expression of a serious historic possibility; though there is no doubt that Mr. Browning was thinking of the England of the Renaissance, which was Shakespeare's England, when he made her speculate on the judgments which Greek art might provoke in some remote place, and at some distant time. The idea of a dramatist who will do what *he* cannot, and will not ruin himself by attempting, is flung out by

Aristophanes, at the laughing end of his defence, as a last expression of the impossible, and naturally to be connected with the least possible birthplace for such a phenomenon : 'the far-away islands where snow and mist harden into tin.' He would have been more just to Shakespeare, had he known him, than he was to Euripides; for he would have been more in sympathy with him. Euripides was an ascetic and a reformer; a man of pure life, and yet one who defended the equality of human rights; and Aristophanes hated these attributes the more because in his heart he felt rebuked by the man who owned them. But his great contemporary was, for this very reason, the true link between pagan Greece and our own Christian time, and Mr. Browning gives Balaustion a last word by consecrating him as such. The passage in which he does this disappears in Mr. Holland's arrangement, which follows the natural order of her adventure; but it forms a fitting climax to all that is pathetic in the work, as well as a brilliant antithesis to the image of repose in death, by which it is preceded :—

'He lies now in the little valley, laughed
And moaned about by those mysterious streams,
Boiling and freezing like the love and hate
Which helped or harmed him through his earthly course.
They mix in Arethousa by his grave.'
. . . . . .
. . . . . .
'He lives! hark,—waves say, winds sing out the same,
And yonder dares the citied ridge of Rhodes
Its headlong plunge from sky to sea, disparts
North bay from south,—each guarded calm, that guest
May enter gladly, blow what wind there will,—
Boiled round with breakers, to no other cry!

All in one chorus,—what the master-word
They take up?—hark! "There are no gods, no gods!
Glory to God—who saves Euripides!"'

'Pippa Passes' belongs in some degree to this group of argumentative poems; because its various scenes all serve to illustrate an idea which is deeply rooted in Mr. Browning's mind: that of the equal significance of small with great things. It takes a religious form in the little heroine's thoughts; for she has a romantic conception of the beauty of rank and wealth; and is sure, nevertheless, that no one of their possessors is worth more in God's sight than she—and it is a religious idea with Mr. Browning himself; but he is thoroughly alive to all the mystery of practical experience which connects itself with it; and 'Pippa Passes' was written to show how slight things do the work of great ones, as well as to remind us that they do it. It is the poetic expression of this great natural truth: everything which we feel has a cause within ourselves as well as outside us; and the efficiency of the external cause depends entirely on the help it receives from the internal one. In plain English, we feel on all occasions exactly as we are in the mood to do so. There is nothing so great but that it may sometimes fail to lay hold of us; and there is also nothing so small but that it may sometimes shake us to our foundation. A whisper will find its way to a deaf ear when a shout will not; and the long ether waves which hit the eye into the sensation of red, need only be a little lengthened to pass over it altogether. If we exchange body for mind, and fixed personal conditions for varying ones, this gives us the whole philosophy of the 'word in season;' and Pippa's

songs are a word in season; or rather, she, with the suggestions of her passing presence, is the word in season herself. Neither she nor her songs might have 'said' anything to her fellow-actors in the drama a day or even an hour before the critical moment; and the bare sound of her voice might have sufficed to do the work, when once the moment had come. It smites the hearers' sense by the contrast of her fresh child's life to their own feverish and thought-laden existence; and with the shock comes a revulsion; the spell of feeling is broken, in which each in his different way was bound. She is the breath of soft air; the sound of church-bells—the sudden touch from another world—which at some time or other has transformed the life of almost everyone of us; soothing our nerves or bracing them into remorse for wrong done, sorrow for wrong intended, the strength to do, the patience to endure. Pippa's real strength is in her unconsciousness; so also is her artistic effect, as she sings her way through the spiritual shadows which this very unconsciousness dispels; but there is also an artistic touch in the vague weariness of mind as well as fatigue of body in which she closes her day. The sun is setting darkly, and there is nothing so tiring to habitual workers as doing nothing. The weariness is fully accounted for. But our fancy irresistibly connects it with less natural things; with the invisible conflict which has been waged around her—the unseen darkness which has compassed her about.

The plan of the poem is varied in the case of 'Luigi,' who is startled by Pippa's songs into fresh courage for doing something *wrong*. But the same end is effected

though in a different way. He believes he is bracing himself to a virtuous act; and even his virtue is more likely to gain than to lose by the personal safety which his effort secures to him.

'Pippa Passes' follows immediately on 'Sordello,' in the chronological order of Mr. Browning's work; and it is interesting to note the difference of the two productions and the manner in which one supplements the other. 'Sordello' is the study of one poetic soul. 'Pippa Passes' is a picture of life in which every variety of character is presented to the reader's mind. 'Sordello' is written in a uniform tone of feeling. In 'Pippa Passes' we find every shade of emotion. It contains strong passion, deep tenderness, and a bright breezy humour, which keeps the atmosphere fresh, but never chills it; and this brings us to another point of interest which it is important not to overlook. The Browning of 'Pippa Passes' was older than the Browning of 'Sordello;' he had laid deeper hold on the realities of life, its contradictions and its deceptions; but he had grown neither cynical nor conventional. We feel this most strongly in the scene between the young French sculptor and the girl whom he has been entrapped into marrying. At the first moment Jules could only forgive Phene, and set her free; on second thoughts he determines to keep and to cherish her. He does not delude himself about her past, which has been everything that childish ignorance and corrupt example could make it; but he believes in the soul which the touch of his purer nature has brought to life; and he sinks that past, in which the newly-awakened moral being, the self-conscious, loved, and loving woman can

have had no part. This is Mr. Browning's constant ideal of love: the power not to forget and to forgive a past wrong, but so to obliterate its very existence that nothing remains to be forgiven.

The meeting between Jules and Phene is followed by the appearance of Bluphocks, and his thoughtless ruffianism forms such a startling contrast to the dreamy, delicate sentiment of the foregoing scene, that Mr. Browning himself has commented upon it. A foot-note to the name of Bluphocks gives these words from the gospel of St. Matthew, which might well serve as a supplementary title to the drama:

'He maketh the sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.'

Mr. Holland has prefaced his story of 'The Return of the Druses,' with an historical sketch of the Druse sect, and so answered a question which must often have been repeated, 'How much of the tragedy is true?' This question does not present itself to those who both know Mr. Browning as a poet and are in sympathy with him; since everything which he writes is founded on fact, and nothing not distinctly put forward as historical is literally true to it. His subject is almost always the 'might have been,' the things which a given person might have said or done, the motives by which a given act might have been inspired; and in this welding together of fact and fiction, the actual and the possible, the first object is that the artist himself should scarcely see the joins. Still there will always be minds to which it is necessary to discover the line between what is virtually true and what is really so. This may be desired from a sympathetic

motive as well as a critical one; and in any case we must be grateful to Mr. Holland, for having placed a curious episode in religious and political history within such easy reach. The play itself is better adapted to his purpose than 'Luria,' or 'The Blot in the 'Scutcheon,' for there is more 'story' in it; though the swaying movement of its plot and characters becomes rather fatiguing when conveyed to us in this necessarily abrupt form. We miss the dramatic atmosphere, which the introduction can only partially supply. Taken as a whole, 'The Return of the Druses' is one of Mr. Browning's most characteristic works; and nothing which he has written satisfies more completely the tragic test of impressing us with pity and with fear. Djabal plays with fire in stirring the depths of Anael's patriotic and human passion; but he does not know that he is doing so: for her nature is single, while his is not, and she burns at white heat under a stress of emotion which drives up many-coloured flames from his own. There could be no stronger instance of natural retribution, than her commission of the crime from which he all but recoils; and the fatal, though natural cross-purpose, in which each of them acts up to an imagined standard in the other's mind, gives the truest pathos to their destruction. We are not sure that Anael is quite so natural as Djabal. Her kind of intensity is not usually accompanied by so much self-comprehension. At all events, we are scarcely prepared for it in an inexperienced girl of the period, and of the nation, to which she is referred. We should rather expect that her love for the man and her belief in his divinity, would confuse themselves in her mind, and she would regard

the one, if she thought about it at all, as the necessary expression of the other. But a more unquestioning devotion might equally have prompted her to the critical act; and the situation in which it issues is so deeply human, that the complete historic fitness of its antecedent circumstance is of slight account. Anael is haunted by the idea that she feels for her prophet only as she might feel for a man. It brings remorse and pain; and she slays the tyrant with her own hand, in the belief that this final sacrifice of her womanhood will both hasten her lover's 'exaltation,' and give her a better right to share it. But Djabal is not exalted. For one awful moment she is confronted by her mistake. From eager expectation, from sickening dread, she flashes into an indignant knowledge of the truth; and then, in as sudden a revulsion, she takes him back to her heart, exulting in her right to love him as the mere erring mortal she has always felt him to be. This 'way of love' has much in common with that which Mr. Browning has described in the second act of 'Pippa Passes.' Both are forms of the protecting tenderness which seeks those who need, rather than those who can entirely repay it. We find it most often in his men, and we know that it is not peculiar to either sex; but it was just that poetry should glorify it in women, because fiction has done so much to discredit it in them. The good girl of the novel never loves a man whom she cannot all round esteem, or does not think that she can; or if she does, she is ashamed of the fact, and poetic justice overtakes her in whatever form of punishment the case supplies. Yet the most angelic, as well as the most earthly forms of attachment

must be those which look *down*. We cannot tell whether the dying cry in which Anael attests her lover's divinity is wrung from her by a returning belief, or by an overmastering impulse to save him in spite of himself; it belongs to the mystery of a last moment of consciousness, and as such neither truth nor poetry would gain by any definite explanation of it.

Djabal is an historical type, and one very congenial to Mr. Browning's fancy. We find him again in the coarser form and more prosaic setting of 'Sludge, the Medium;' and 'Sludge' may be said to represent the philosophy of the character, as Djabal represents its poetry. His confession is a searching analysis of the manner in which deception and self-deception may play into each other's hands. The time is fast waning when a schemer and a mystic can be found in the same man; and the transformation of Djabal into Sludge, marks the descent of self-deceiving impostorship from the historical stage to the domestic. Yet this form of deception retains a certain claim upon our sympathy, for it is one of those mental facts, in which the history of the Race still repeats itself in the history of a great many individuals. The 'Race' has outgrown the possibility of a Djabal, and only repeats him in the meaner and already expiring form of Sludge; but there are few imaginative children who do not, at some time or other, play at Djabal's enchantments, and work themselves into a momentary belief in their own performance of them. The old instinct of the supernatural persists side by side with the reason which condemns it, and in the same mind. Djabal's dying speech is deeply touching, and Mr.

Holland's prose gives the substance of it. There was, perhaps, no sufficient motive for quoting it in full; yet we regret that he could not do so, because the verse has a slackening and intermittent movement, which admirably conveys both the solemnity of the feeling and the growing physical effort with which we imagine it to have been expressed. In his closing words :—

'On to the Mountain! At the Mountain, Druses!'

we see the little tide of Druse national existence flowing over his wasted life and that of the woman whom he loved; we hear the ring of its recovered liberty and of its new hopes—and we are confronted by a moral, trite enough as far as expression goes, but which bears a fresh significance for every human life: 'Fair means are better than foul.' The Druse cause was not advanced for one moment by the fraud and violence which were exerted in its behalf; its 'problem' was naturally resolving itself when fraud and violence were conspiring to cut it through. The course of events did not frustrate these crimes, but it rendered them useless; it rolled onwards to the legitimate goal, casting crime and criminals aside. The modified 'foul means' which we are tempted to use, have nothing in common with Djabal's offence; but often, like his, they force the hand of circumstance when it is working for us. And we do not die as he does; but we live to endure the deepest of all regret, because the most hopeless: that which utters itself in the inward cry, 'Had we but waited!'

In judging the remainder of Mr. Holland's stories—as, indeed, with regard to all of them—it must be remem-

bered that they are written for those who do not know Browning, in no sense for those who do; and that the necessary deficiencies which cause a feeling of disappointment in the latter case, only raise expectation in the former. Mr. Holland would have failed in his object if his readers were content to rest on what he has done: and he sends them to Mr. Browning himself with the certainty that their highest expectations will be fulfilled. The story-telling process is not that of a partial critic who picks out plums, and gives them as average specimens of the work on view, leaving its drier portions untouched; nor do the works with which Mr. Holland has had to deal leave room for this kind of selection. In the dramas, at least, the harmony of thought and expression is unbroken. Such beauties as Mr. Holland has extracted from them are not separate gems, but fragments, necessarily roughened and defaced, from a poetic mine, as large as life itself and as deep as the human truth by which Mr. Browning's genius has been inspired. The poems from which these stories are taken are a little world of men and women; and everything which men and women can do or feel is set forth or suggested by them. The dreamer and the man of action are side by side in 'Sordello.' Truth and sophistry, cynicism and enthusiasm, in 'Aristophanes' Apology.' The perfect mother's love is shown in the 'Ring and the Book;' the brother's, in 'The Blot in the 'Scutcheon;' the friend's, in 'Strafford;' the lover's, in 'Colombe's Birthday.' Pippa is the ideal peasant-girl, and not an impossible one: simple, trusting, and self-reliant; with a healthy enjoyment of innocent pleasures and as healthy a shrinking

from those which are not innocent; and Guria deserves to head the list, or at least to conclude it, as Mr. Browning's most perfect expression of human greatness and goodness. We may, indeed, doubt whether a being ever existed who combined, as he does, all that is most beautiful in the man's nature and in the child's. He belongs rather to the realm of poetic than to that of natural truth. We may be sure, nevertheless, that Mr. Browning felt the type as possible, or it would have found no place in his imagination. The 152nd verse of 'The Two Poets of Croisic,' published only a few years ago, may stand as a motto for every character he has drawn, every picture his words have painted for us.

'But truth, truth, that's the gold! and all the good
I find in fancy is, it serves to set
Gold's inmost glint free, gold which comes up rude
And rayless from the mine. All fume and fret
Of artistry beyond this point pursued
Brings out another sort of burnish: yet
Always the ingot has its very own
Value, a sparkle struck from truth alone.'

A. ORR.

June 20th.

ROBERT BROWNING.

STRAFFORD.

ENGLAND had been for more than ten years without a Parliament; Eliot had died in prison, after having been confined for years in punishment for opposition to the King in the House of Commons; ship-money had been illegally exacted, despite Hampden's efforts; Puritan pamphleteers had been maimed, scourged, and pilloried; Nonconformists had been forced to emigrate to America; and arbitrary power had been fully established in Ireland by Lord Wentworth, when this daring and crafty champion of the crown was summoned to London in consequence of the success of the rebellion in Scotland.

Fierce as was the hatred of the patriots against the apostate, who had helped to carry through the Petition of Rights and then left them to become a

peer of the realm, President of the Council of the North, and, finally, Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, Pym still hoped to be able to bring his old friend back to the people's side. So he hastened to him in company with Hampden and Vane, according to our poet, as soon as it was known that the newly-created Earl of Strafford had failed to keep his master from prematurely dissolving the Parliament, which he had persuaded him to call together early in 1640.

Strafford, meanwhile, complains to the King:—'Laud, who hatched this war, falls to his prayers and leaves me alone. I always loathed the business, but yet I offered to bring an Irish army to support the English one. Fifty times you told me it was a brave plan. My army is raised, I am ready to join it, but now my whole design is set aside. I am forced to lead the English army, and who will answer for the Irish one? Is this my plan?'

The King says Strafford is disrespectful, but he answers:—'My liege, do not think so. I am yours to the death. Let all these mistakes pass for mine elsewhere. Here I am alone with you, and I must soon rush upon a giant in the dark. We need the Parliament frightfully, and cannot afford any error with them.'

'I have undone you, Strafford!' exclaims Charles.

'Nay, sir! Why despond? What have I said

to hurt you? I unsay it. Do not turn from me! We will make a shift. Leave me the Parliament; if they give us ever so little help, I will make it answer. They are sitting, and that is a great thing; that almost gives us their sanction. Let them keep their money, if it must be so; what we want most is the reputation of the people's help. But whatever sum they offer we will accept; for the smallest grant tells Scotland that Parliament is on our side. What will they give us?'

'Alas!'

'We never expected to get all we asked for. How much will it be?'

'Have you not heard?' falters Charles.

'Heard what? Speak at once, sir! This grows terrible!'

The King continues silent, and at last Strafford exclaims:—'You have dissolved Parliament; but I will not leave you. O God, my last hope of winning your love is lost! Your heart is cold as stone! Now I see your perfidy! Shall I tell Pym?'

Here he is interrupted by the entrance of the very man he is speaking of. Hampden, Vane, and other patriots follow. Charles is speechless; but Strafford tells the rebels, as he calls them, that he and his master have acted in perfect harmony. When the King has left them, Pym reminds his enemy how he said, as they parted eleven years before, 'Do

you leave us, Wentworth? While your head is on your shoulders I will not leave you;' and adds, 'We shall meet again.'

'So be it,' replies the Earl. 'And what if an army follows me?'

'His friends will take care of your army, answers Vane.

To protect Strafford against indignant patriots, jealous courtiers, and a faithless king, he has no friend but the gentle Lady Carlisle, who, much as she grieves to find him love Charles more than her, respects his devotion too much to tell him how sadly it is wasted. As he departs for Scotland, she gives him a curl of her glossy hair; and when he calls her the lingering golden streak in the evening of his good fortune, she answers, 'When the eve has its last streak, the night has its first star.'

Soon she hears that he is returning defeated and disgraced, and that his enemies, who are now assembled in the famous Long Parliament, are about to impeach him. She begs the King to dissolve them. But before this is done by the dilatory and irresolute Charles, Strafford comes to tell her that he has proofs to show that not only the patriot leaders, but the courtiers, have held treasonable correspondence with the Scottish rebels. He goes to the House of Lords, accompanied by a great army of followers. Pym is there already. Before Strafford can begin to accuse his enemies, he

is impeached himself and forced to leave the House. The usher demands his sword in the name of the Commons. He draws, and calls for help to escape from the trap into which the King has lured him. His own adherents disarm him, and he is committed to the Tower.

Before the House of Lords passes judgment on the charge of high treason, brought by the Commons of England against Lord Strafford for introducing arbitrary government, and attempting to subvert the laws, Hollis, whose sincere patriotism does not prevent his remembering that his sister had been the Earl's wife, tells Charles that he alone can prevent the fall of the only pillar which props his tottering house of privilege. Sir Harry Vane has produced his father's record of Strafford's offer in Council to bring troops from Ireland, 'to force this kingdom to obedience.' The Earl will be sentenced to death if he does not justify himself, as he could easily do, by showing that the acts most censured were done in obedience to the royal orders. In that case the question will be whether king or minister shall fall. The time has come for Charles to show that he is indeed a king, by speaking to Parliament in his servant's defence. This the monarch promises. Then, when Hollis has departed, he signs, at Lady Carlisle's request, a command to her brother, Lord Northumberland, to bring the army to London, and place it under

Strafford's orders. Of this plan he wishes to have the sole credit, and she consents, knowing that to prove the King faithless will take away all that her friend lives for. So she hastens to Strafford, fearing that her heart will beat so that she cannot speak to him, and calling herself unworthy of him because she cannot be satisfied with the thought of his never knowing that it is she who saves him. Deeply is she grieved when he refuses to listen to her plan, boasts that he has nothing to fear, calls her a slight, graceful girl, too tall for a flowering lily, and promises that she shall soon hear him impeach Pym and his fellows.

These managers of the trial are now about to do what one of their own party blames as snatching away the last spar from the drowning man. Vane, too, well as he knows whose single arm rolled back the advancing good of England, and set up in its place the woeful past, protests that he cannot bear the thought of having murdered Strafford. Pym, however, is ready to take the whole responsibility, and Hampden says — when entreated to interfere, and reminded how his eyes grew thick with tears as Strafford spoke—'England speaks louder. Who are we that we should play the generous pardoner at her expense, and waive advantages magnanimously? Shame on him who turns to his own mean account the opportunity of serving her with which she trusts him!'

Pym's friends say that they wish some weightier charge had been made out, and that they never thought it could come to this.

He answers, 'But I have made myself familiar with this one thought, and had it before me as I walked, and sat, and slept. I have acted ever as the chosen man that should destroy the traitor. You call these charges petty; but can we come to the real charge? He is safe against that in the tyrant's stronghold. Apostasy and treachery are not crimes. We must bring in this Bill, and thus roll away the clouds of precedent and custom, bidding the great beacon-light God sets in each man's conscience shine upon the guilt of Strafford. And yet my youth and our friendship came back to me at the trial as he looked at me, and for a time I was —— It is very sad! To-morrow we have points of law to discuss.'

'I knew you would relent,' interposes Vane.

'Hazelrig, you will introduce the Bill for his attainder the next day. Pray for me!'

Before calling thus on King, Lords, and Commons, to decree Strafford's death in their legislative capacity, Pym goes to Charles, whom he finds full of admiration at the Earl's generosity in throwing no blame on the Crown, as well as of delight in the prospect of his escape without needing Lady Carlisle's help. On being shown the Bill of Attainder, and told by its author that it will not be introduced unless there is

a certainty that, in case the Lords and Commons should vote its adoption, the King will yield to the manifest will of England, Charles exclaims :—

'He is my friend! I might consent to this if I had not wronged him already! We forget that he has a wife and children. Why, this would be signing the warrant for his death! I will take the advice of the Commons. Indeed, I never meant that Strafford should serve me any more. But this Bill is unworthy of you, sir! Prevent it, and I will forget that you ever mentioned it to me. Are you satisfied?'

'Listen to me, sir,' answers Pym. 'Eliot once laid his white, wasted hand on my forehead. Wentworth has talked whole nights with me. Hampden loves me. How can I breathe and not wish well to England and to her King?'

'I thank you, sir. You will let that King keep his servant. Thanks!'

'Let me speak! I may not speak again. My spirit yearns for a cool night after this weary day. I would not have my soul grow yet more sick in a new task, even more solemn than this, and more full of the utmost weal or woe to England. I thought that if I found myself alone with you after this trial, I might say something to you as man to man that would warn you and save you. Mark me, King Charles! Save *you*, not Strafford! But it is God that must do that. Yet I warn you, with Strafford's

faded eyes still gazing at me, if you would not have it asked, "How long must the many endure the rule of one?" promise me that, if England consents to Strafford's death, you will not interfere. Otherwise ——'

'God has forsaken me! I am in a net and cannot move. It shall all be as you say.'

Scarcely has he consented, when Lady Carlisle rushes in, to tell him how beautiful with joy her friend looks at hearing he is not deserted by his master, and how generously he refuses to take any help that might endanger his king, but she sees Charles' white face and the fatal parchment.

Pym departs, saying to himself, 'No drawing back! England has spoken to my soul! The end is very near!'

Then Lucy Carlisle exclaims, 'I am to save him! All else have shrunk away; I alone am left. Heaven will make my hand strong now as well as my heart. After that, let me die.'

Accordingly, she persuades Strafford's fellow-soldiers to follow her to the Tower, in force enough to compel the lukewarm governor to permit them to place the Earl on board a ship which will carry him to France. Hollis, whom she bids inform the King of her plan as soon as it succeeds, and whom she charges never to let his brother-in-law know that it was not Charles that saved him, warns her that it is

vain to hope of outwitting Pym, and asks her what reward she hopes to have for exposing herself, so young and fragile, alone among rude mercenaries.

'Don't you think I may go to France with him?' she answers. 'And you will reward me, for you have lived with him from his youth, and known him before affairs of state bent down his noble brow. I have learned something of his later life, and I shall know all his future; but you will help me make his youth my own also. You will tell me all when he is saved.'

'My gentle friend, he should know it all and love you.'

'Love me? No! Too late for that! Let him love the King. I have your word for keeping up the old delusion and making it seem all his scheme. Now to my gallant friends!'

That evening Strafford sits in the Tower with his children, and hears them sing:—

'O bell' andare
Per barca in mare,
Verso la sera
Di Primavera!'

This, he tells his son William, is a song for Venice, whose islets the mainland is hardly willing to let go. Then, as the boy says he shall go there some day, he bids him see many lands, and England last of all, for that is the way to love her best. The child asks why

it is, then, that men say he sought to ruin her; and the little girl complains of the songs about him she hears sung in the street.

'Well, this has been the fate of better men,' muses the father. 'But will not Time, who comes in the twilight to mend all the caprices of the fantastic day, will not he do me right? Something has been done for Ireland; too little, but enough to show what might have been. The songs will say that I forsook the people. Nothing more? No doubt but Fame, that busy scribe, will turn a deaf ear to her thousand slaves, who are noisy to be enrolled, and pause to register some ingenious commentary on such plain inscriptions as the patriot Pym, and the apostate Strafford!'

Hollis now enters with a companion, who, he says, must be present, and who, Strafford supposes, is one of the jailors. The Earl is eager to talk about the quiet life he expects to lead after his release, sitting under a quince-tree beside the fish-pond at his country-seat, and now and then venturing up to London to hear the news, and be himself appealed to in some tavern, to tell whether the fallen minister's first name was James or John. He has no curiosity to hear his brother-in-law's news, which, he thinks, is merely an explanation of the King's not having come in person to set him free. At last he sends the children away, saying he is determined to keep them loyal, and then,

after blaming Charles for making him go forth like a runaway, instead of leading him out by the hand in public, he calls for the order of release.

'Spare me!' answers Hollis.

'Why, he would not have me steal away in an old doublet and a steeple hat, like Prynne's, or be smuggled into France? I must think of my children. It was for their sake I was so patient on my trial, and did not give back the lie to any of your Puritans. Why should I make my boy prove son to a prison-breaker? I shall stay here! The King should know this. He has children, too. You, sir, feel for me, I see,' he says to the attendant. 'You need not hide your face. It may have looked on me from the judgment-seat—I am sure I have seen it somewhere—but I thank you for coming, for there is one who does not come.'

'Forgive him, as a man should, who is about to die,' urges Hollis.

'True! We must all die, and we all need forgiveness! I forgive him with my whole soul.'

'Strafford, you are about to die!'

'Sir, if you have come to set me free, this jest is heartless and does harm. Ha! You are weeping! Let me end this. See this paper, warm with lying next my heart. The King's promise: "Strafford shall take no hurt in person, honour, or estate."'

'The King ——'

'I could unking him with one breath! You sit where Loudon did, who came to prophesy my execution, and offer me Pym's grace if I would renounce the King, and I stood firm on the King's faith. The King ——'

'Has signed the warrant for your death.'

'Put not your trust in princes, neither in the sons of men, in whom is no salvation.'

'You would not see me at your feet, Strafford?' says the attendant, who now shows himself to be King Charles. 'It was wrung from me! Do not curse me!'

'As you hope for pardon in your own need, be merciful to this most wretched man,' says Hollis.

Now the children are heard singing in the next room, and their father begs the King to be kind to them, and let the boy serve him, for he will need friends. His own complaints he hopes his sovereign will pardon, and take his blessing. Then Charles calls in the lieutenant of the Tower, and says:—

'Balfour, go to the Parliament. Say I grant all their demands. Their sittings shall be perpetual; they may keep their money; I will come to them for every coat I wear, and every crust I eat; only I choose to pardon Strafford.'

'Does your Majesty hear the people howl for blood?' answers Balfour. 'The walls cannot keep out the murmur. Be pleased to retire.'

'Take all the troops, Balfour.'

'There are about a hundred thousand of the crowd.'

'Come with me, Strafford.'

'Balfour,' breaks in the Earl, 'say nothing about this to the world. I charge you to forget that you have seen his agony. Or you may say that the King was sorry, and even that he wept. I shall walk the more lightly to the block because of it. Earth fades, and heaven breaks on me. I am about to stand before God's throne. The moment is close at hand when I may lay my whole heart bare before my Maker, clear up all the errors of my life, and gain happiness for evermore. There, King Charles, I shall pray for you. You are witnesses that he could not prevent my death. Lead on now, before he recovers. All must be ready! Tread softly; there are children at play in the next room. Lead on! I follow ——'

'Me!' exclaims Lady Carlisle, entering with her soldiers. 'Follow me, Strafford, and be safe.' Then she begins to tell the King that everything is arranged as he ordered; but seeing his state, she breaks off and says to the Earl: 'You know all, then! I thought it looked best to have him save you. It is a shame that you should owe me anything. But no, O Strafford, you'll not feel any shame at being saved by me?'

'It is all true,' says Hollis. 'It is she who saves

you. All her deed! Is the boat ready? Speak to her, Strafford! See how she trembles and waits for your words. The world is yet to learn its bravest story!'

'We can talk afterwards,' says she. 'There will be time enough in France to sit under the vines and talk of home.'

'You love me, child! And I could escape?'

'Hasten!' she cries. 'Bring forward the torches!'

'I will die,' says the Earl. 'They call me proud; but England has met me, her strength against mine, and she has a right to have me show that her chosen foe is not a craven. I fought her to the utmost, and fell; now I am hers, and I will die. Besides, girl, Eliot is here, with his patient brow. I think you would be repaid if you could know how much I love you!'

'Then, for my sake!' she urges.

'Even for your sweet sake I must stay.'

'For your children's sake!' says Hollis.

'To bequeath a stain to them? Humour me, girl, and let me die!'

'Awake, King Charles, and bid him escape!' cries she.

'Nay, I will go. Should I forsake the King? I will not draw back from one more service. And, after all, what is disgrace to me? Come, child, lead on!

But I feel strangely. Surely it was not meant to end in this way?'

'Lean on me,' she says. 'I can support him, Hollis.'

But he stops, saying: 'Not this way! This gate—I dreamt of it, of this very gate.'

'It opens on the river. Our good boat is moored below; there are our friends.'

'Not by this gate! I feel what will be there—something dark and fatal. I tell you, I dreamed of it! Do not touch it!'

'It is to save the King,' she urges.

At last Strafford opens the door, but there stand Pym, Hampden, Vane, and their friends in such force that he retreats before them. Then Pym advances slowly, and confronts him, saying:—

'Have I done well? Speak, England! For her sole good I have laboured still, disregarding my own heart. I have made my youth barren and my future waste to offer her a sacrifice—this man, this Wentworth here. He walked with me in youth and loved me; and him, because he forsook England's cause, I have hunted by every means, knowing that she would sanctify them all; hunted him even to the block which waits for him. As I say this, I feel no bitterer pang than I felt first, in the hour I swore Wentworth might leave us, but I would never leave him. I leave him now. I render up my charge to England who

imposed it. Be witness, O God! I have done her bidding. It may be poorly, wrongly, and with ill effects, for I am a man; still, I have not faltered for a moment, but done my best—my human best. It is done! And having said this, I will say more. I never loved but one man. David had not more love for Jonathan. I love him even now. And in that world where great hearts that have been led astray are brought back again, and where I am soon to go—for, certainly, now that my mission is over I shall not live long—I look for my chief reward in stealing aside to walk once more with Wentworth, my youth's friend, purified of all errors, and renewed gloriously. And Eliot shall not blame us. This is no meeting, Wentworth! My tears grow too hot. Around the face I loved once, gathers a thin mist. Is it blood? Hereafter be our meeting!'

'I will meet you then, Pym,' answers Strafford, who already has a vision of the blood which is to flow after his. 'I, too, have loved England. It is well that I die now. Youth is the only time to decide our course; with manhood must follow action. It would be dreary to have to alter our whole life in old age, when our strength is gone. I wish to be set right when we meet again, but not now. Better die! And if there has been any fault of mine, that will die, too. Poor, little, old Laud may dream out his dream of a perfect Church in some blind corner.

There will be no one left for me to trust the King to except you, Pym. But, oh! what friends has he? He is weak, too, and loves the Queen.—Oh, my fate is nothing—nothing! But not that awful head! What must I see? It is all here. My God, how Thou wilt plague us and satiate hell! You, Pym, would help England, but through you it will become a charnel-house.'

'England, I am thine own!' answers the stern patriot. 'If thou exact even such a service, I obey thee to the end.'

SORDELLO.

NEARLY seven hundred years ago the river Mincio formed around Mantua a great marsh, which separated the city from the low mountains, covered with firs, larches, and rings of vineyard, among which stood the little castle of Goito. In that lonely fortress might have been seen a slender boy, in a loose page's dress, coming every sunset to sit beside each one, in turn, of the patient, marble girls who lay or crouched beneath a cumbrous font in one of the vaults; or watching the thievish birds at work among the grapes in autumn; or lurking, in the stormy winter evenings, beside the arras, and lifting a light with both hands to the embroidered forms of the ancestors of Eccelino da Romano, surnamed il Monaco, a Ghibelline prince, whose wife, Adelaide, was mistress of Goito. Her own apartments were closed against our hero, who was known only as the orphan child of Elcorte, an archer who, soon after the boy's birth in 1194, when the Imperialists were driven out of Vicenza amid great slaughter and conflagration, had laid down his own life in saving his mistress,

Adelaide, and her new-born son, afterward famous as Ecelin the Cruel.

We find Sordello wandering at will over the rest of the castle, with its dim, winding stairs and maze of corridors contrived for sin, through the ravines down which slip the streamlets singing softly, and amid the forests of maples, myrtles, and evergreens, which cover the hills that look toward Mantua. His calm brow, delicate nostrils, and sharp, restless lips, show that he is

> 'Foremost in the regal class
> Nature has broadly severed from her mass
> Of men, and framed for pleasure, as she frames
> Some happy lands, that have luxurious names,
> For loose fertility; a footfall there
> Suffices to upturn to the warm air
> Half-germinating spices; mere decay
> Produces richer life; and day by day
> New pollen on the lily-petal grows,
> And still more labyrinthine buds the rose.
> You recognise at once the finer dress
> Of flesh that amply lets in loveliness
> At eye and ear, while round the rest is furled
> (As though she would not trust them with her world)
> A veil that shows a sky not near so blue,
> And lets but half the sun look fervid through.'*

To all he saw that was lovely, he gave fresh life from his own soul. His ruling desire was to find something to worship, and bury himself in each ex-

* *Works*, 1868, v. ii. p. 19, ll. 24, &c.

ternal charm; for he was not one of those strong souls which develop some new form of loveliness within to match each one that is seen without. His whole life was in his fancies.

> 'As the adventurous spider, making light
> Of distance, shoots her threads from depth to height,
> From barbican to battlement: so flung
> Fantasies forth, and in their centre swung
> Our architect,—the breezy morning fresh
> Above, and merry,—all his waving mesh
> Laughing with lucid dew-drops rainbow-edged.' *

As he let his rough-hewn bow of ash sink from his aching wrist, he imagined that he had sent a golden shaft hissing through the Syrian air to strike down some defender of Jerusalem against the crusaders. As he picked grapes and filberts, he dreamed of himself as the young emperor, Frederick the Second, quaffing wine with the Soldan, or looking at the bunch of dates which the titular King of the Holy City sent his imperial son-in-law, to remind him of his promise to reconquer Palestine. Or, again, he fancied himself Apollo, slaying the Python, and wooing Delian girls.

All these inferior idols soon cast off their borrowed crowns before a coming glory. One evening he stumbled by accident on Eccelino's daughter,

* *Ibid.* p. 26, ll. 24, &c.

Palma, who sat thenceforth conspicuous in his world of dreams, with her blue eyes, her rich red lips, and her tresses flowing in a gorgeous shower of gold, so that the ground was bright, as with spilt sunbeams. The servants fired his fancy by telling him how Palma had been promised by her father to the Guelf chief, Count Richard St. Boniface, one of the Capulets of Verona, and how the Ghibelline maiden rejected his suit.

At last, as the first pink leaflets bud on the beech, and the larches brighten in the spring sunrise, Sordello goes forth buoyantly, hoping that to-day's adventure will secure his visioned lady,

> 'Whose shape divine
> Quivered i' the farthest rainbow-vapour, glanced
> Athwart the flying herons!' *

On he goes through the brakes of withered fern and over the great morass, shot through and through with flashing waters, each foot-fall sending up a diamond jet. Still Palma seems floating on before him, and he thinks that when he has passed the next wood he will hear her confess her love.

He clears the last screen of pine-trees before Mantua, and there, under the walls, amid a gay crowd of men and women, sits his lady, enthroned as Queen of the Court of Love, at which the trou-

* *Ibid.* p. 40, ll. 1, &c.

badour, Eglamor, contends for her prize against all comers. The famous minstrel sings of Apollo; but before the people's frank applause is half done, Sordello has begun the true lay with the true end. On flies the song in a giddy race after the flying story, word making word leap forth, and rhyme, rhyme. As he closes, the people shout and crowd around him. Then Palma gives him the prize, and also a scented scarf, warm from her own neck, a great golden braid of her hair touching his cheek as she bends over him. He swoons with joy. When he wakes he is back at Goito; but a crown is on his forehead, the gorgeous vesture he has won is heaped up beside him. Palma's scarf is around his neck, and the women tell him that she has chosen him for her minstrel. Eglamor is dead with spite, and the other troubadours have brought home their new chief.

Thus Sordello became one of the most popular of Lombard poets; but he could not remain so. He found his native Italian too crude a language to allow a tithe of his thoughts to reach the ear. He welded on new words, but they proved too artificial and cumbrous. Then, again, he tried in vain to rise above the singers who simply tell of the lovely forms they see around them, and to become a poet who, through such pictures, gives revelations of the loveliness in his own nature, so that the hearers shall love in him the love that leads their souls to perfection.

The Mantuans would not see in Sordello any trait of even his meanest hero. Much as they applauded his praise of Montfort's victories over the Albigenses, they did not give him the credit of having any such courage of his own. Moreover, in praising this heresy-hunter, he found himself led into repeating the commonplace opinions prevalent around him; and when he broke away from them and tried to give original ideas, he was blamed for being too abstruse, and not building on the common heart, as a bard should do who was no philosopher. The praise he won as a poet did not seem to him what he merited as a man. He took less pains than before with his verses, and they gained less and less applause. At last his friends told him that his wings seemed to have grown weak, and begged him to soar as high as he could in the song with which he had been chosen to greet the triumphal entrance into Mantua of the famous Ghibelline soldier, Salinguerra. Sordello wandered about, seeking vainly for inspiration, until he reached Goito, where he flung his crown of laurel into the font, and there was no song of welcome for the city's guest.

The minstrel remained silent and solitary in the lonely castle, but in Mantua there was great rejoicing. The sudden death of Adelaide enabled her husband, Eccelino da Romano, to take the step which gave him the surname of the Monk. He entered the

cloister, and, as he did so, proclaimed a truce between the Imperialists, who had been his partisans, and the adherents of the Pope. To insure peace, he announced that his daughter, Palma, should be married to Count Richard, and his two sons, Ecelin and Alberic, wed two Guelf ladies, Giglia and Beatrice. It was hatred of these alliances that brought the fiercest of the Imperialists to Mantua. Salinguerra was then sixty years old; and he had been fighting against the Guelfs ever since boyhood, when they robbed him of his first love, Linguetta, as they did afterward of his young wife, Retrude; who was a daughter of the Emperor, Henry VI., and who disappeared with her infant son in the Vicenza massacre soon after Sordello's birth. At the news of peace he left Naples and his Emperor, with whom he had promised to sail as a crusader, and rode half a score of horses dead in his haste to reach Lombardy. Before he arrived, however, matters had gone so far that he thought it best to pretend to acquiesce in the suspension of hostilities. So he showed no interest in anything but pageants, and even took the place of Palma's father, already a monk, at her betrothal with Count Richard.

But in her he found a kindred spirit, and it was secretly agreed between them that the marriage should be postponed as long as possible, and the first pretext for a rupture promptly seized. Accordingly, Palma

was still delaying her journey to Verona, where she had promised to marry the Count in his palace, when the Guelfs of Ferrara revolted against Salinguerra in his absence, burned his palace, and murdered the wives and children of his adherents. At once they found the old soldier back in their midst, setting street after street on fire, and riding in blood up to his horse's fetlocks. Count Richard hastened with Azzo, Marquis of Este, and other leading Guelfs, to drive Salinguerra out of Ferrara, but permitted himself to be decoyed to a parley, at which he was treacherously taken prisoner. The whole Lombard League of nearly twenty cities that took the side of the popes against the emperors rose in arms to deliver him from Salinguerra, who strengthened himself at Ferrara with great bands of mercenaries.

Such was the state of things in the autumn of 1224, when Sordello, now thirty years old, met Palma at Verona. She had timed her journey so cunningly as to arrive just after Richard's departure, and thus gain a plausible pretext for charging him with breach of faith. She had sent for her minstrel, who received her summons on the very day on which an earthquake changed the marsh, hitherto formed by the river Mincio around Mantua, into the lake which now laughs there. Sordello hastened to his mistress, though he thought that she only wished for him to

compose the music for her marriage with his rival. He reached Verona while

> 'A last remains of sunset dimly burned
> O'er the far forests, like a torch-flame turned
> By the wind back upon its bearer's hand
> In one long flare of crimson; as a brand,
> The woods beneath lay black.' *

No eye but the poet's cared for the soft sky. Trumpets were pealing and alarm-bells booming. The carroccio—a car which carried the city's standard, the crucifix, and a great bell into battle—was being dragged into the market-place, where the people were crowded together listening to the fiery speeches of their magistrates, and eager to march against Salinguerra and show that Verona was no unworthy member of the great league.

The Count's palace had a dim closet which overlooked this tumult, and there Sordello and Palma sat with their fingers interlocked, while she told him, with a coy, fastidious grace,

> 'Like the bird's flutter ere it fix and feed,' †

how she had pined for some out-soul, as she called it, which should direct all the force that was expanding within her; and how she had accepted him as her lord ever since that April morning when his face, not

* *Ibid.* p. 6, ll. 8, &c. † *Ibid.* p. 86, l. 6.

unknown to her, burst out from all the other faces at the Love Court.

'I was vainly planning how to make you mine,' she says, 'when Salinguerra showed me how to break loose from Count Richard and the Guelfs. My father and brothers have given up the leadership of the Lombard Ghibellines, the best part of our inheritance. You and I will take the vacant place. To-morrow morning I will put on a gay dress like yours, and we will flee together to Ferrara. There Salinguerra will recognise us as his superiors, and help us serve our emperor. Tell me if I am wrong in believing that this cause and this destiny are yours.'

Sordello was dumb with joy, and she took flight before he could express his rapture at the knowledge of her love, and the prospect of becoming a king and embodying his own will in this aggregate of souls and bodies, as he had dreamed of doing.

So he and Palma reached Ferrara, and found this lady-city perishing under the violence with which her brutal lovers tried to tear her from each other. A young Guelf was moaning at the sight of a shrivelled hand nailed to the charred lintel of the doorway, within which he had seen his father stand, bidding him farewell. An old Ghibelline howled over a little skull with dazzling teeth, which he had dug up in the heap of rubbish where his house was burned. A

deserter from Salinguerra came back to find his palace razed so adroitly that he did not know the spot, but sat on the edge of a choked-up tank, ploughing the mud inside with his feet and singing the song with which the Ecelins rode into battle, until one fierce kick brought up his own mother's face, caught by the thick grey hair about his spur. Another Ghibelline had murdered his brother; a woman of Ferrara offered to sell her own daughters to Sordello; and he heard Salinguerra boast of burning hostages alive.

The sight of all this suffering led our hero up from dreaming of ruling men to aspiring to serve them. He confessed to Palma, as they talked that night alone beside a smouldering watch-fire, his unwillingness to join the Ghibellines. She urged that the Guelfs were just as cruel; but he longed to find some better way than that pursued by either faction. One of the sentinels came up and bade him sing of Rome. Sordello welcomed the conception of this city as the point of light from which rays traversed all the world. In her he saw embodied a plan to put mankind in full possession of their rights. Visions of her laws and her new structures crowded upon him, and he felt himself called to build up her authority. He knew how zealously the popes and bishops had taken the part of the Lombard cities and defended them from emperors and nobles. This cause seemed that

of the people against the princes, and of the future against the past.

He faltered as he remembered how slowly Rome was built: the first generation satisfied with their caves, the second shaping their dreams into rafters and doorposts, but not solving the mystery of hinges, later ages bringing a goodly growth of brick and stone, and still later ones giving the world sewers, forums, amphitheatres, and aqueducts, until alabaster and obsidian became common, and statues of Jove and Venus rose above the baths. His courage returned, however, as he remembered how rapidly Hildebrand built up the papal power, and how mightily this great pontiff's successors laboured, joining strength with strength in the crusades, meeting pernicious strength with strength in the Lombard League, and almost dispensing with any need of strength in the Truce of God. At last he resolved to imitate these great workers, and begin by making a convert of Salinguerra.

Just before sunset he found the old warrior sitting with Palma in his own dreary palace. He had been giving audience to the Emperor's envoy, the Pope's legate, and the League's ambassadors, and was now complacently planning his next move, and considering what use he should make of the new badge of authority just sent him by his imperial master. Despite sixty years of fighting and scheming, he showed all the nonchalance of youth.

'So agile, quick
And graceful turned the head on the broad chest
Encased in pliant steel, his constant vest,
Whence split the sun off in a spray of fire
Across the room ; and, loosened of its tire
Of steel, that head let breathe the comely brown
Large massive locks, discoloured as if a crown
Encircled them, so frayed the basnet where
A sharp white line divided clean the hair.
* * * Square-faced,
No lion more ; two vivid eyes, enchased
In hollows filled with many a shade and streak
Settling from the bold nose and bearded cheek.
Nor might the half-smile reach them that deformed
A lip supremely perfect else—unwarmed.' *

But thirty years of idle dreaming had left Sordello stunted, haggard, worn-out, and really old. He stammered, and was so awkward and bashful, that his speech at first deserved only scoff. Salinguerra, who, careless of his words as he seemed to be, had never been found at a loss for the right one, listened with good-natured contempt to one whom he knew only as an archer's orphan son and Palma's too much favoured minstrel. Indeed, the Ghibelline veteran showed such scorn of the advice to release his prisoner, open his gates to the League, and turn Guelf himself, that Sordello was roused to eloquence. He pleaded the cause of the people, whose faces he saw filling the

* *Ibid.* p. 127, ll. 6, &c.

dim chamber, so powerfully that Salinguerra began to admire him and at last determined to make him his ally. Suddenly he flung the Emperor's badge around the orator's neck and welcomed him as Palma's husband, head of the Romano family, and leader of the Lombard Ghibellines.

And now, apparently without a single word being spoken, there sprang to light a secret which Palma had heard from her dying stepmother, namely, that Salinguerra's wife and child, who were supposed to have perished in that Vicenza massacre from which Elcorte saved Adelaide at the cost of his own life, had both been rescued. The mother died soon after and was buried secretly in the font at Goito, but the son was kept there in concealment and neglect, under the name of Sordello, as Elcorte's child by this crazy woman, who was jealous of Salinguerra's superiority to her own lord. Palma's knowledge of this treachery had encouraged her to attempt to restore his birthright to Sordello, whom we will still call by this familiar name.

He sat pale and silent, but his father laughed with joy as he told how the Emperor was going to destroy the papal power and place all Lombardy under a prefect, whom he himself had leave to name. His son must take this office, and reign over not only Lombardy but Tuscany, in virtual independence of Frederic himself. So he ran on, until Palma drew

his iron arms away from the shrinking shoulders of Sordello, who rose, tried to speak, and then sank back. In order to give him time to recover she led his father, who staggered, in his joyful excitement, down the narrow stairs into a dim corridor, lighted only by a grating which showed in the west a ragged jet of fierce, gold fire. There he sat down on a stone bench and splintered it with his truncheon, until Palma began to repeat her lover's poems, and tell how all the world loved him and thought that his wan face eclipsed even Count Richard's. Salinguerra drank in every word, as though an angel spoke, and as she finished praising his son,

> 'He drew her on his mailed knees, made
> Her face a framework with his hands, a shade,
> A crown, an aureole : there she must remain
> (Her little mouth compressed with smiling pain
> As in his gloves she felt her tresses witch).' *

Soon he kissed her brow, placed her beneath the window, as in the fittest niche for his saint, and began to pace up and down the passage, pouring forth scheme upon scheme of what he would do for her as soon as she should wed that foolish boy. At last they heard him stamp his foot, and both rushed upstairs to him anxiously, the father taking the lead despite his heavy mail.

* *Ibid.* p. 181, ll. 10, &c.

Sordello had sat gazing at the river, until its sky-like space of water became one richness of stars, and the moon rose slowly to complete the heaven. He felt that he had needed some steady purpose to uplift his soul, as the moon sways the ocean. Lacking such an influence he had been so shaken by every caprice that he had lived without a purpose, and so missed life's crown, while others with not half his strength had finished their work.

> 'The Body, the Machine for Acting Will,
> Had been at the commencement proved unfit;
> That for Demonstrating, Reflecting it,
> Mankind—no fitter: was the Will Itself
> In fault?'*

He still wished to serve the people, but really doing it seemed so doubtful that he was sorely tempted to accept the crown his father offered him, and live only for present pleasures, leaving the future out of sight. Then he thought of the sages, champions, and martyrs, who dashed aside the cup of pleasure and so gained the better life which this life conceals. His body was too weak to endure this fierce mental struggle, but it closed by submitting himself entirely to that sole and immutable power which does not forbid us to love aught that is lovely, and which is to be loved as it is revealed in our humanity.

* *Ibid.* p. 74, ll. 3, &c.

With his last remaining strength he stamped on the Emperor's badge. Salinguerra and Palma found it lying under his feet, as he sat there —dead.

'Under his foot the badge: still, Palma said,
A triumph lingering in the wide eyes,
Wider than some spent swimmer's if he spies
Help from above in his extreme despair,
And, head far back on shoulder thrust, turns there
With short, quick, passionate cry: as Palma pressed
In one great kiss, her lips upon his breast,
It beat.' *

They laid him beside his mother in the stone font he loved. Nothing now remains of him but a name in the chronicle, and a few verses still sung at Asolo. Thus ends the story told in the hope that it may help

'Some soul see All
—The Great Before and After, and the Small
Now, yet be saved by this, the simplest lore,
And take the single course prescribed before,
As the king-bird with ages on his plumes
Travels to die in his ancestral glooms.' †

NOTE.

This story is taken from a poem so famous for obscurity that I add a synopsis of its six books. The first opens by showing why the author wrote a narrative poem and not a drama. Then comes a picture of Verona and

* *Ibid.* p. 207, ll. 17, &c. † *Ibid.* p. 206, ll. 11, &c.

Italy in general, at the time when Sordello eloped with his lady love; and the last half of this book describes his early life at Goito. The second relates his first success and ultimate failure as a troubadour. One half of the next book is occupied by Sordello's journey to Verona and Palma's declaration of love, but the remainder is taken up by a bewildering digression, which interrupts the story in order to describe how the poem was planned at Venice, where the spirit of humanity revealed herself to the poet. This portion of the work ends with a warning against hasty judgments, given in the form of a legend about the Apostle John's visit, on the eve of his exile to Patmos, at the house of his disciple, Xanthus, where he saw such a picture that

> 'Dead swooned he, woke
> Anon, heaved sigh, made shift to gasp, heart-broke,
> "Get thee behind me, Satan! Have I toiled
> To no more purpose? Is the gospel foiled
> Here too, and o'er my son's, my Xanthus' hearth,
> Portrayed with sooty garb and features swarth—
> Ah Xanthus, am I to thy roof beguiled
> To see the—the—the Devil domiciled?"
> Whereto sobbed Xanthus, "Father, 'tis yourself
> Installed, a limning which our utmost pelf
> Went to procure against to-morrow's loss;
> And that's no twy-prong, but a pastoral cross,
> You're painted with!"'*

The rest of the poem is comparatively easy; and the scene is laid at Ferrara. The fourth book describes the horrors caused there by civil war, and their leading Sordello to desert the Ghibelline cause, which his lady favoured, and advocate submission to the Pope. The fifth

* *Ibid.* p. 110, ll. 28, &c.

relates the vain attempt to make Salinguerra turn Guelf, the discovery that this chieftain is our hero's father, and the opportunity thus given Sordello to become ruler of Upper Italy. The sixth and last book tells how he struggled against this temptation to desert what he fancied the people's cause, and died under the excitement of self-sacrifice.

As such a preference for the Guelf side appears in the poem, I must take the liberty of reminding my readers that the Popes of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries turned Southern France from the home of peace, industry, and enlightenment, into a field of blood, sent the flower of European chivalry to perish uselessly in Syria and Egypt, denounced the treaty with the Turks by which Frederick the Second had Jerusalem thrown open to Christian pilgrims, and kept stirring up the Germans, as well as the Italians, to fratricidal strife. Surely no one of Sordello's contemporaries can be called the champion of peace, freedom, and culture, so justly as can the great Emperor just mentioned, who gave full tolerance to his Moslem and Jewish subjects, founded the universities of Naples and Padua, had Aristotle translated into Latin, encouraged free trade and the emancipation of the serfs, made laws to protect the chastity of women, abolished feudal and ecclesiastical tribunals, gave the middle class a representation in parliament, and raised Sicily and Southern Italy to such prosperity as was enjoyed by no other country in Europe. No wonder that the keen-sighted and patriotic Dante took sides with the Emperors against the temporal power of the Popes.

So, in fact, did the historic Sordello; for there really was a poet of this name, as will be seen by looking into the histories of Provençal and early Italian literature, or into Longfellow's notes on the description of Dante's

forerunner in the Sixth Canto of the 'Purgatorio.' There was also actually an elopement of this troubadour with a daughter of Eccelino il Monaco; but it was the Cunizza, introduced into the Ninth Canto of the 'Paradiso,' and not her half-sister, Palma, whose name was probably substituted by Browning for the sake of euphony.

One of the real Sordello's extant poems contains the passage which I have freely translated thus:—

'I love a lady, fair without a peer,
Serve her I'd rather, though she ne'er requite
My love, than give myself to other dames,
However richly they might pay their knight.
Requite me not? Nay. He who serves a dame
Whose honour, grace, and virtue shine like day,
Can do no service which the very joy
Of doing doth not bounteously repay.
For other recompense I will not pine,
But should it come, her pleasure still is mine.'

LURIA.

AT the beginning of the fifteenth century Florence was striving to conquer Pisa and Lucca, the last strongholds of the Tuscan Ghibellines. Florentine generals had so often been tempted by success to usurpation, that the Republic usually employed mercenaries to lead her troops, and the command was now entrusted to a young Moor named Luria, who had won so many victories over the Pisan and Lucchese armies that one more battle seemed likely to end the war.

His movements were closely watched by Braccio, a Florentine civilian who was sent as Commissioner for the Republic to direct him. This Italian was determined that brute force should not rule Florence, but intellect govern her; vicious intellect if this must be, but intellect at all events, for thus the way would remain open for virtuous intellect to mount her rightful throne. It seemed to him incredible that a mere mercenary, bound to Florence by no common faith or kindred blood, no ties of past or future, should prove more trusty than her own sons had been. So he thought it only a prudent precaution to

accuse Luria of treachery to the Republic, and thus provide, that as soon as he had conquered Pisa and Lucca, he should be removed from his place, and this should then be given back to Puccio, a Florentine soldier who had been deprived of it in order to make room for the Moor. Braccio did not inform Puccio of this plan, but kept him in readiness for it as second in command, and easily drew from his jealousy of his successful rival, materials for formal accusations against Luria, who seemed to his critics too careless of the interests of Florence and too courteous towards the Pisan general, Tiburzio. To this antagonist the Moor, for instance, had sent back one of Pisa's best battalions, which had laid down its arms on account of misunderstanding its general's signals.

Luria took all the less pains to avoid misconstruction, because he loved Florence devotedly, not merely out of gratitude for the honour and trust which she had given him, but also out of admiration for the vigour with which the mother of Dante and Boccaccio, Cimabue, Giotto, Gaddi, Orcagna, Donatello, Ghiberti, and Brunelleschi, was then leading all the rest of Europe out of mediæval darkness into the rosy dawn of modern literature, philosophy, and art, rearing her cathedral and palaces, bidding the statue ascend to dwell in its niche, and the painter's brush people her walls, causing the long-forgotten voices of the bards and sages of Greece and Rome to be heard

once more, and calling out a crowd of eager adventurers, not only to imitate the ancient models, but to win fresh laurels in new paths. Indeed Luria felt so confident of the literary and artistic pre-eminence which was actually attained by Florence, as soon as she was at peace, that he used often to express his hope that he might not be shut out from enjoying it, and threaten, jestingly, that he should then be dangerous.

It was especially unfortunate for his reputation with his employers, that he had fallen in love with Domizia, a noble Florentine lady who was eager to revenge her father and brothers, recently ruined by false charges of disloyalty. She had come to the camp, partly because a party hostile to Braccio had desired to post her as a spy on him, and partly because he had himself secretly laboured for the same end, in his wish not to lose her from his sight. Nothing but friendship had been avowed by either her or Luria, but she kept praising his services to the Republic, and warning him that his predecessors had been treated with ingratitude. Thus Braccio's suspicions were whetted constantly, and his secret despatches to the Signory who ruled Florence filled with complaints of Luria's treachery. Indeed, he urged on the trial all the more vigorously, because the campaign seemed likely soon to end in a crowning victory for Florence.

Such is the state of things on the day when

Luria's trial in Florence and his warfare against her enemies are to end together. Pisa's last army is drawn up, ready to meet the Florentines, but the generals on both sides delay joining battle. Reinforcements are expected from Lucca, and their coming either will enable Luria to gain a decisive victory, or else will make Pisa strong enough to escape from instant ruin. Braccio sends off that morning, by different roads, two copies of a letter, urging the Signory to condemn the Moor at once, despite the protestations of Jacopo, the Commissioner's secretary, who assures his master that the city is safe, if only for Domizia's sake, and that Luria believes in Florence, as the saint tied to the wheel believes in God.

Noon comes, and Luria is about to follow Braccio's directions and attack the Pisans, when their general, Tiburzio, visits him as an envoy, and says, 'You know our danger. There is scarcely a chance of our winning this battle. If we lose it, Pisa falls. Now, if you, who threaten us, were a son of Florence, and yet endowed with all your present nobleness, the news I must communicate would not detach you from her.'

'Detach me?' exclaims Luria, indignantly.

'You think you know Florence,' answers the Pisan. 'I know her so well, I have found out from her Commissioner's secret despatches, which I have captured on the road from time to time, that her

Signory is now carrying on your trial. You wonder? Here is Braccio's last letter, sealed as it was when it left your camp an hour ago. The duplicate is on its way. Read it, and then I shall have more to tell you.'

'Florence!' groans the Moor.

'I admit, Luria, that if you were a Florentine, this letter would not justify your falling away, let it hold the worst it can. Our mother city is still the mother. She may take our services as she pleases, and we have no right to think about reward. But you are not bound by such a tie. You are a foreigner, and at first there was no reason why you should give yourself to Florence rather than to Pisa. The city you war against is as fair and famous as that you fight for—as full of noble heads and patriotic hearts. To a stranger neither cause can seem the only just one. Florence has withdrawn the love and trust which made you hers. You are as free now as in the beginning. Let Pisa make you an offer. Break the seal and read.'

'Tiburzio, if this were your case, if you were to find out—No—this is madness.'

'That Pisa would crush me when I had crushed her enemies? Well?'

'What should you do then?'

'Why, Luria, I expect that Pisa will pay me much as Florence does you. All cities are alike. But I am a Pisan, and you are not a Florentine. Read the letter.'

'But what can I do if I lose my faith in Florence? She stands to me for mankind. My friend, you may be very sagacious, but here you must be mistaken.'

'Give me your hand, Luria! I lead the vanguard. I shall speak for you if you fall. It was my duty to tell you this, but I rejoice to see that it has no effect. You will look gallantly, if you are found dead with that letter in your breast!'

'Tiburzio, I must see these people before I decide. Go back and sound your trumpet. If mine does not answer, you will know that I believe you and am Pisa's.'

Luria says to himself, as Tiburzio leaves him, 'My heart will have it that he speaks the truth. If he had come to my lonely tent at night, when the wild desert was full of foes, I should have given him bread and salt, and slept securely between his knees, while he took his turn to watch. But can I trust my heart?

'Oh world, where all things pass and nought abides!
Oh life, the long mutation—is it so?
Is it with life as with the body's change?
—Where, e'en tho' better follow, good must pass,
Nor manhood's strength can mate with boyhood's grace,
Nor age's wisdom, in its turn, find strength,
But silently the first gift dies away,
And though the new stays, never both at once.' *

* *Works*, 1868, vol. V. p. 70, ll. 13, &c.

'The time for following savage instinct is passed. That cold, certain, European way is better. Yes, I am sure of their calm sagacity and deliberate choice of the good. I am sure they understand me and are just to me. The wild beast of the desert wanders into the drifts in the tempest and is lost, but the calm, instructed eye of man holds the bearings fast, and is sure that, when the storm subsides, the guiding stars will shine forth once more, and the palm-trees and pyramids be found. So I will trust in my Florentines. That Pisan is deceived.'

When Braccio comes with Domizia to tell Luria that it is time to join battle, he cannot, however, help showing the letter, and asking if he should fight better or worse for knowing what is to be his reward.

Then the Commissioner answers, 'If you serve Florence merely for pay, like any vulgar swordsman, break the seal and read. You will find all that you deserve.'

'But tell me, friends,' asks the Moor, 'what would one of you Florentines do if he were to suspect that such a letter would show that he was about to be flung aside ungratefully?'

'Thank God and take vengeance,' cries Domizia, as she hears the Pisan trumpets. 'Turn the city's own army against her, and at the very moment when her foes are sounding defiance.'

'But my simple Moorish instinct bids me deepen my obligations to you,' breaks in Luria, as he tears up the letter, and commands that his own trumpets be sounded in reply. 'The battle! That shall solve every doubt.'

He leads the onset himself with more than usual impetuosity, cuts the Pisan vanguard and centre to pieces, and takes Tiburzio prisoner; but, in his haste, he permits the soldiers on the wings to retire with little loss and rally round the Lucchese, who come up at the end of the battle. Thus there is but half a victory, though Braccio declares that afternoon, in the presence of Puccio and Domizia, to Luria, that this battle with his previous services saves Florence. As the Moor now claims his right to be told what he had refused to know before he fought, the Commissioner answers, 'It is no novelty for innocence to be suspected, but simply its privilege. Charges were presented against you some time ago. I do not say whether they were true or false. I say only that Florence was plainly bound to examine them. She has done so. This evening the trial ends; and I am sure that your innocence will be as plain to all men as it is to me.'

'Florence, Florence, to the end! My whole heart thanks thee!' exclaims Domizia.

Puccio is indignant at finding what use Braccio has made of his complaints against his general, and

declares, 'I do hold myself aggrieved, and have spoken mere truth; but I did not mean to help on a trial. You should have told me.'

Domizia asks whether Luria is to be sentenced to the block or to the wheel, and Braccio replies :—

'There is no sentence yet, and I shall give no opinion of my own as to what it ought to be, or is likely to be. There is nothing at present for any one to praise or blame.'

And to Luria's question whether it is right to try him, he answers :—'I assert the absolute right of Florence to do all she can have done in this business, to stand on her guard, and take even such services as yours with the most suspicious wariness. Friend may trust friend, and love expect its like, without paying any heed to all the world's experience, gained from martyred brains and broken hearts. When a new brain bursts, or a fresh heart breaks, it is merely another moth singed in the candle. But Florence is no more John or James, who may expect to succeed where all others have failed, and who, when he meets his fate, leaves Paul and George to try their chances. Florence exists because individuals pass away. She has been built to supply such a type of man as is refused by men's deficiencies. She binds so many together that she stands steadily above them, though they change and pass away. As the sun forms that city of clouds, hanging yonder, out of

a thousand vapours, which rise and sink again but leave the pageant steady there, so Florence is the sun which draws us all up into one form, different from us all and better than any of us. Shall she dare to stake her existence on any one's fidelity? Man's heart is weak, and its temptations are many. She ought to prove each servant to the utmost before she grants him her reward.'

Domizia inquires what she does for the servants who deserve reward, but get none, because Florence makes mistakes, and the Commissioner replies:—

'What does she not do, if only in giving them herself to serve? Now of Luria here, what would his strength be worth if she had not armed it thus? Florence took him up, and turned all his fire one way, and there he stands. So she took me out of all the world, and fixed my ice to stay his fire.'

'Has obedience no fruit?' breaks in Luria. 'And do you remember that I am the captain of a victorious army? Suppose I call in my soldiers to judge between us, and tell them in their enthusiasm of conquest, how, when I have done my work, I find Florence all ready to sentence me? Which of us will they take part with? If I resist your sentence at their head, what will you do, Braccio?'

'I will rise up like fire, proud that I taught Florence to know you thoroughly, and so saved her.

I will bid all Italy see the need of our precautions. That moment all your strength will go, and the very stones of Florence cry out against the exacting Luria, who resented thus her first slight probation, as if he were the only man on earth who cast no shadow and could suffer no suspicion. Reward! You will not be worth punishing.'

'Florence judged of me thus!' sighs Luria. 'And thus you reported me! And you, too, Puccio, you gave information against me! Must I go on? You, lady, called me your friend, so I must ask you if you had any further end, beside my good, in all you have told me of the perfidy of Florence to her generals?'

'I am a daughter of the Traversari, and foresaw all this. I knew that the Florence which doubted their faith would certainly mistrust a stranger's, and keep back his reward. I felt sure that you would not die of the shame as they did, but would fight against her.'

'All of you are against me, the foreigner. Is there not one witness in all the world to my good faith?'

'Here he is!' says Tiburzio, who has overheard this speech. 'Thus I show my trust in you. I live for Pisa. She is not lost yet. Her army has been beaten, and I am here, but Lucca is come at last. I had rather see Pisa lost three times over than saved by any traitor, even you; for the sight of a traitor's

success would bring evil, and no good. Pisa rejects all traitors. She only bids you save yourself, and so save her. I would not have you turn the army of Florence against her, or bring it over to us. You need give her no such ground for calumny. You shall be all we gain, and all she loses shall be your head to deck some bridge with. Let her perish in her perfidy, a by-word in the mouths of all men! Go to Pisa! In her name I resign to you my charge, the highest of all her offices. Let me testify to your rectitude in Florence. I told Pisa of it from the first. To Pisa, then!'

'Are you caught, my Braccio?' asks Domizia.

He turns to Puccio and tells him that Florence now bids him take the place held hitherto by Luria, as she has long intended he should do, but Puccio answers:—

'No, no! I am grateful, of course, but Luria is wronged, and he is my captain. That is not the way we soldiers climb to fortune. I dare not take it. No soldier could!'

Then Luria says:—

'Hitherto I have kept my course, through ingratitude and insult. Now, real wrong fronts me, and I will punish Florence. I shall not lay aside my power until she bids me do so. To-night my sentence arrives; then you shall see. Thanks to you, Tiburzio. You are free. Join the army of Lucca:

I suspend all warfare until to-night. And you, my bland accuser, go back to Florence; carry your self-approving head and heart safe through an army which would trample you dead in a moment at one sign from me; tell your friends, that while I await my sentence, theirs waits for them. You, lady, have black Italian eyes, that often seemed inclined to remove the barrier which Florence says that God builds up between us; I would be generous if I could, but, alas! this hour demands simple justice—I can only pardon you. Puccio, my trusty soldier, conduct them forth.'

In all that army there is not a heart which does not feel that the quiet, patient hero has been wronged, and does not beat freer after those silenced spies have left the camp. All the soldiers are eager to take Luria as their natural lord, and follow him to Florence. Puccio, however, says to Jacopo:—

'I can be only a trained fighting-hack. I shall keep the faith I have been taught by you Florentines, who laugh at it. I shall take the army you offer me, though it will be only a muster-roll of names, and fight against a better man than myself. But I know that, whether Luria leads on his indignant troops and destroys Florence, or whether, to her everlasting shame, he merely pardons her and saves Pisa from her, either way he is winning victories for me and every other soldier.'

Husain, a faithful Moor, who has noticed that the Italians insist on having Luria's blood beat time with theirs, and will not even let him kiss God's naked hand until their priests have gloved it, has often warned him that Braccio and Domizia have no hatred towards each other as deadly as their seeming friendship to him; and now he implores him to turn both armies at once against Florence. And Domizia returns at sunset, to assure him that it is not in savage revenge or lust of power that she would have him abolish the guilty city, but because sparing her would encourage her in her sins, and justify her bloody past. His fall would strike down Lurias yet unborn, just as it is over her own prostrate house that he himself is reached. Thus his cause seems to be mankind's.

But he says, when they leave him to himself:—

'If I were to will that easy vengeance, and lay beautiful Florence, with her domes and palaces, low —not even in a dream be such an outrage—what hope or trust in all the forlorn world would be left me after that irreparable wrong? My life's illusion would have fled! How strange that Florence should be so mistaken in me! What word or deed of mine could have injured me? Perhaps one more word out of my heart would have changed everything. It must have been my fault, for they gain nothing and risk all. I thought of staying here passively, and going when they dismiss me. But would this be generous? Even

if I could keep my soldiers in their ranks, I should teach the friends of Florence to mistrust her, and confirm her enemies in their harshness. And how sad she will be when she finds out, as one day she must, that my heart was hers. I will not let my friends who made pictures of me, and sang songs about my battles, suffer for the sake of those old fools in the Council. There is my own sun sinking out of the sky. He has blessed our Florence, and all her hills, fields, gardens, olive-grounds, and vineyards. Yet methought he gave Pisa more advantage than us. He does not burn the earth in anger for not understanding him. No, he drops quietly out of the sky when his task is done. The new sun will be welcomed to-morrow. So shall some new Luria be praised and I forgotten.'

He draws from his breast a phial—all he brought from his own native land. He meant to use it only when defeated hopelessly; but now he drinks from it what must close his day of triumph. As he will not let the enemies of Florence shelter him against her, there seems to be no way for him to escape death, and he is determined to save her the disgrace of inflicting it. He has mounted a pinnacle of self-sacrifice above which he cannot rise, and below which he will not fall.

Puccio assures him that the city has gone too far to stop short of his ruin, for she must distrust his

magnanimity even more than she did his innocence. But Luria unfolds all his plans for making her the queen of the country to the astonished Florentine, who asks him if he really expects that Pisa will shelter him after this, or that even this will disarm Florence. Luria, however, says he has one all-powerful friend who is waiting for him, and shows such eagerness to have the whole credit of completing this great work go to Puccio, that this officer finally says :—

'Not for fifty hundred Florences would I accept any other post than my rightful one—here at your feet. Alas! that I should have had so much trouble in finding out my true place! Now I wish only to be a tool in your right hand, that your glorious heart may make mine beat doubly fast. I have no more fear of Florence. Half-a-dozen words, such as I can speak now, will show her how she has erred, or, at the worst, I will follow you to exile and death!'

At this Luria assures Puccio that he hopes still to help him to work for Florence, and to praise each happy blow he strikes for her. The Moor's last task is to gain from Jacopo the promise that he will do his utmost to clear the fame of Domizia's father and brothers.

It is nearly midnight when Braccio returns, and with him comes Tiburzio, who has not gone to the

Lucchese army, as was permitted by his conqueror, but straight to Florence.

'I have taken the best way to serve Pisa,' he explains to Luria. 'A people is but the attempt of many to rise up into one complete life, and the models are of more value than the mass. You are such a man that your fate is of more importance to Pisa than her own apparent welfare. If we can keep our model safe new men will arise, and other days show how great a good it was that Luria lived. I might have joined Lucca's army, as you bade me, and taken advantage of your disgrace to repair our loss; but where, then, would be Luria for our sons to see? No, I look further. I have declared my submission to your arms and testified to your full success, making your probity plain to Florence, as no one else could. I spoke and all was clear.'

'Ah! till Braccio spoke,' answers Luria.

'Till Braccio himself told his great error. He knows you now, Luria. Nay, it is I and not you, who should droop the head. Yet I do not, for I feel sure of your pardon. So let night end and sunrise come. Speak, Luria! Here begins your true career. Now the glory and grandeur of all your dreams will be fulfilled, and every prophecy except one. You said that you would punish Florence.'

Then Braccio sees that this is done, for Luria is dead.

THE ADVENTURES OF BALAUSTION.

THE first of these was in 413 B.C., when the great expedition of Athens against the Syracusans failed, her whole army was captured, and the news of her defeat tempted many of her allies to revolt.

'My native city of Cameirus, in Rhodes,' says our heroine, 'was among the rebels against the home of Sophocles and Euripides—the light and life of all the world. Some of my kindred and friends were moved by my entreaties to flee with me to Caunus, in Caria, where we took a ship for Athens. All the way I kept reciting from the great Attic poets, especially from Euripides. Sometimes it was a whole play, and sometimes a drop of honey from a chorus. If a star rose, or a cloud surprised us, I told how star and cloud were sung by the meteor-like poet of air and sea, of the mind of man, and all that's made to soar. The sailors gave me a new name, and called me "Wild-pomegranate-flower Balaustion," for they said I was like that bountiful tree, whose ruddy bloom surpasses

that of even the rose in Rhodes—the very isle of roses; promising not only beauty and fragrance, but food, drink, means of healing, and the nightingale's song.

'Before we had reached my heart's true haven, a contrary wind drove us so far out of our course that when it ceased we knew not where we were. Suddenly we saw a pirate close behind us, and began to row for the nearest land, which the pilot thought was Crete. The pursuer gained on us; but I sprang upon the altar by the mast, and sang the great song with which Æschylus made immortal the victory of Athens at Salamis. Now the oars churned the black water white, the pirate was left far behind, and soon we gained a full view of the sea-port. Alas! it was Syracuse. We were running from the wolf upon the lion. Before we could take counsel, a galley dashed out of the harbour, and we were asked if we were friends or foes to Sparta. Our captain answered that we were Rhodians from Caunus, and reminded them that this city had followed Rhodes into the great league against Athens.'

'"Ay! but we heard all Athens in one ode," answered the Syracusans. "Your passengers are Athenians, though your ship may be from Caunus. For the sake of Caunus you may take them to that city if you will; but for the sake of Athens you must leave this harbour. No matter how many pirates

are waiting for you. We want no more Athenians here."

'The captain prayed in the name of all the gods for pity, but found none. He was about to turn back to meet his fate, when the Syracusans shouted, "Wait!"

'Wait we did, you may be sure.

'"We know Æschylus as you do," they went on; "but how about that new poet, Euripides? Do you know any of his verses, too?"

'Then we felt safe; for we remembered that many of those poor Athenians who were taken prisoners with Nicias had saved themselves from dying, and even gained their liberty, by reciting from the great dramatist. Our captain at once made ready to drop anchor, and shouted for joy, as he told about his lyric girl, and I said: "Brother Greeks, save me, and I will repeat a whole play for you, the strangest and sweetest song of Euripides. I saw it acted only last year in my own isle. It is called 'Alcestis,' and does much honour to your own Hercules, whose temple here all Greece praises. I come as a suppliant to him; take me to the steps of his house. There I will tell you of his exploits, and he shall bid you set us free."

'Greeks are Greeks; and poetry is power. Out broke a great shout of joy: "Thanks to Hercules for a holiday! Into the harbour! Let all our city know that we are bringing in more Euripides!"

'All the crowd along the shore took up the cry, "More Euripides!"

'The whole city was astir. Soon I stood on the topmost step of the temple, and told every word I heard, and all I saw and felt.

'First I pictured the silent palace of King Admetus sleeping in the sun, and Apollo gleaming forth from the portico in all his dreadful beauty, as he comes to relate how he toiled for the king as a shepherd in obedience to the command of Jove. In gratitude for the kindness with which he had been treated, he has prevailed with the Fates to release Admetus from impending death, on condition that some one will die for him; and, though no one else would do so, not even his father, his wife Alcestis has willingly offered herself, and this day is to be her last. As he speaks, Death appears to claim her, and there is a fierce dialogue between this heap of blackness, looking like a fallen eagle, and the shining god. They depart, and in marches the chorus of mourning friends, who soon are met by a servant, come to tell them how the queen has robed herself nobly, and honoured every altar in the palace with garlands and prayers, but without shedding a tear, except when she visited her bridal chamber for the last time, and how she is now bidding farewell to her husband and children, and all the household, speaking to even the meanest.

'Then Alcestis enters, ready to depart to the ferry-

man of the dead, and already hearing his call. She begs her husband to requite her for this great sacrifice by promising that he will never place a step-mother over the little boy and girl whom she leaves behind her. Admetus solemnly binds himself not to take another wife, but to devote all his remaining days to mourning her who has given herself to die for him. He addresses many a word of endearment to her, but now she does not give him a single one in return. All her tenderness is reserved for her children. It seems as if she has at last become aware of her husband's selfishness. Indeed, this is manifest in his not expressing, during the whole scene of farewell, any regret that he suffered her to die for him, or any wish to take her place, and bear the doom at first decreed to him. He lets her die before his eyes, and bids his subjects render her all due honours.

'While he is preparing for the funeral, Hercules enters, bound for the capture of the horses of Diomede, as he tells the chorus. They warn him that these steeds eat human flesh, but he laughs defiantly, and declares that this is just the adventure for him. Admetus returns, with sable robes and shorn locks. Hercules asks him whom he mourns; but the king answers that it is only a stranger who has been living under his care. Thus he deceives Hercules to prevent him from taking shelter elsewhere. This the generous guest begs leave to do, but has to

yield and let himself be conducted into the palace, after giving Admetus an embrace which makes his cheek wince, as the lion's hide rubs against it. Now the chorus praise the king's hospitality, and herald the entrance of the funeral train. Pheres, the father of Admetus, offers to join the mourners, but his son forbids it, and blames him fiercely for not being willing to die instead of Alcestis. The old man retorts by making the cowardice and selfishness of Admetus plain even to himself.

'As soon as the procession has departed, the servant who has been waiting on Hercules comes out of the palace to blame, not Pheres, or Admetus, but the hero himself, who has been eating, drinking, and singing, in utter ignorance of the queen's death. This Hercules now finds out, and his mirth ceases at once, greatly to the menial's satisfaction. He flings his mirth chaplet to the earth, and rushes off without his club to the superb sepulchre, resolved to conquer the black-robed King of Corpses, even if he must seek for him in Hades. So he goes, rejoicing in his strength, for this is a true sign of likeness to the gods, that the hero blossoms into even fuller gladness at what he does for mankind. And when he suffers so much for them, that the blossom of joy turns to sorrow, it has only become a seed, which drops into the ground and springs up once more, to rejoice in doing good.

'Meantime the widower returns, so conscious, at

last, of all his misery and shame, that the chorus cannot comfort him. Ere long Hercules comes back, with his arm around a slowly moving, heavily shrouded, and almost lifeless woman, whom he has won, he says, as a prize in a contest, with the excitement of which his whole frame is seen still to quiver. After fully testing the fidelity of Admetus to his wife's memory, first by advising him to re-marry, and then by begging him to receive the captured woman into his house, both which suggestions are repelled indignantly, Hercules at last takes off her veil, and there, with a silent smile stands Alcestis.

'This story I told them fully and faithfully, though I think it might be told yet better by some one of the only royal race that ever was or will be—the poets,—who give no gift that does not turn itself into new treasures for him who takes it into his soul. Such a poet would say that Apollo taught Admetus, not only to yoke lions and wild boars to the car in which he came to win Alcestis, but also to subdue all his own lusts and greeds, and so learn to rule wholly for his people's good. His wife admires this so much, that she persuades Apollo to gain for her the privilege of dying instead of her husband. Admetus refuses indignantly, but she reminds him of the good he is doing, and assures him that she cannot live more truly than in helping him continue to live thus. Finally, she bids him look in her face before he

decides. Then her soul enters into his, he gives back her look, and so Alcestis dies. Her soul descends to Persephone, but the pensive queen of the twilight remembers her own lost girlhood, and sends Alcestis back to her husband, saying that the gods cannot suffer him to possess all his wife's life as well as his own.

'Three times over, on successive days, I repeated the whole play on the temple steps, and then the Syracusans let us depart with benedictions. One rich man brought me a talent of gold, but I left it on the tripod in the fane, an offering to him who had saved me from death, as he did Alcestis. The Athenian captives who were starving in the quarries sent me a crown of wild-pomegranate blossoms, and thus my name was fixed. Every day as I began my play I saw a young man waiting at the foot of the steps, and when I embarked on the ship, I found him there also, eager to go to Athens. It was Euthucles the Phocian. When we reached the sacred city, we went together to visit our poet, and found him living like a statue in its niche, with scarcely a friend except Socrates, who never misses the chance to see one of his plays.'

This is the first adventure of Balaustion, which she told one evening in spring to four other girls, Phyllis, Charope, Petale, and Chrysion, under the grape-vines which grow beside the streamlet close to the temple of Bacchus, at whose feast, the next month, she married Euthucles.

Seven years went by, during which Euripides, who had little sympathy with the demagogues then in power, and felt keenly the unsparing ridicule flung at him by Aristophanes and other satirists, left Athens and took refuge in Macedon with King Archelaus. Before he departed he gave to Balaustion his lyre, his tablets, with the style still hanging to them, and the entire manuscript of his 'Frenzied Hercules,' saying that he was all the more desirous to have it win her love, because it had gained no other prize. Athens was rejoicing over her great victory at Arginusæ when news came of the death of her exiled dramatist, and changed all the shouts of triumph to lamentations. Even the populace, who had but just before been screaming with laughter as they saw him ridiculed by Aristophanes, in his 'Thesmophoriazusæ,' a play still extant, were now as loud in their grief, and their declarations that his body should be buried in the Piræus, his statue erected in the theatre, and his epitaph written by Thucydides.

'Neither Euthucles nor I,' says Balaustion, 'had been to the play. He had seen it before, and I had been so disgusted at the "Lysistrata," which I saw soon after reaching Athens, that I did not wish to see anything written by Aristophanes. My husband had brought me the sad news, and I was about to do the last honours to our lost poet, and read aloud the play which he left with us, when there was a loud

knocking at the door, shouting of wild songs to the music of flutes, and calls to open in the name of Bacchus. At last a voice without said that Aristophanes was waiting there, and then Euthucles rose and threw wide the door.

'There, in a blaze of torchlight, stood the chorus of the comedy which had just gained the prize, fifteen men who had been dressed as women. There also were the three actors who had taken turns in holding up our dead poet and his friends to ridicule. There were the flute-players and dancing-girls, headed by the shameless Elaphion, who had helped the mock-Euripides to seduce the policemen. And there, in the midst, stood the great satirist himself, with his bald head crowned with laurel, his veins swollen and cheeks reddened with drinking, his black eyes flashing out their native fire in triumph, his wide nostrils still seeking for incense, his head thrown back in defiance, and his beard white as if with the foam of the wine-cup. Never before had I seen how a mighty mind could force fierce lusts and appetites to be as silent as the snakes choked by the infant Hercules.

'Before my frown the companions of Aristophanes slunk away in silence, but he himself entered boldly, with a word or two of compliment, and the assurance that he had come to help us do honour to Euripides. I bade him welcome, and told him how much I admired the wit which flashed out like lightning to

purify the world, striking down injustice and piercing the armour of every knave and coward, though I would have it spare the laurel wreath around the true poet's lyre. I, too, could praise the steady patriotism which flamed forth like a beacon, warning Athens from the rock towards which she was steering. I hailed light everywhere, I said, though it gleamed murkily.

'Aristophanes answered by declaring that freedom and comedy were born together at Athens, in those old days when witty rustics would take advantage of the license of the feast of Bacchus to disguise themselves in skins, daub their faces with dregs of wine, mount a cart, and go about in the night-time from house to house, charging this rascal with starving his slaves, and that one with kissing his neighbour's wife, while the friends who had followed on foot stood around and shouted approval, thus at length suggesting the song of the chorus. This first generation of satirists could only be said to have battered with stones, but the next ones had used a rough-hewn club, which had come down to Aristophanes himself, and which he had found it so hard to smooth and ornament that he must let those who should follow him be the first to use polished steel. How well he had at last learned to wield his own club that day's success bore witness.

'"I and my actors, chorus, dancing-girls, musicians, and friends," said he, "were feasting in triumph this

very evening with the high-priest of Bacchus, when there was a sharp knock of authority, and an aged man marched in majestically, and walked in silence, through the two silent ranks of guests, who stood up to do him honour, his grey brows bent on the ground, until he reached the pontiff, when he raised his head and said, in deep tones, 'Priest, thou desirest that thy god be honoured fitly; wherefore I announce that at his feast next month the chorus of my plays shall appear clothed in black and without garlands in memory of Euripides.'

'"Then the grey head bowed down again, and Sophocles wrapped himself once more in his mantle and passed out mutely through our mute ranks into the night, where perchance he joined those gods who are said to guard his age. At this my feast broke up, and I thought that, as it is only from the sunset that we can learn what potencies of rosy and purple hues have lain concealed in the light of the sun all day long, so I could best find all the richness of the genius of the departed poet still showing itself in you, our Rhodian rosy with Euripides. Thus I come seeking to know and honour him."

'I accepted his assistance in our commemoration, but checked him as he proposed to point out weak spots in the "Frenzied Hercules." Indeed, I even ventured to tell him how sorry I was that he, who was battling so bravely against the war policy, and the

demagogues, should have turned aside from his foes so often to fling mud at his fellow-fighter, who was striking his best against them.

'"The most dangerous of all these enemies is philosophy," answered Aristophanes. "This is taking away our faith in the gods, unsettling our time-honoured morality, and changing Athens from a city of warriors to one of talkers. Why did Euripides put these new views into his dramas and say that there is no shame for him who does not think of it, and that there are no gods except necessity? And why has he made our sacred heroes, the demi-gods, so forlorn that the audience gives them contemptuous pity, instead of the worship which is their due? Why, again, has he made his slaves and women so prominent as to rob free men of their supremacy? Worst of all, why has he, the sworn servant of the Graces, renounced so madly the rosy world he was born for, and in which he might have lived surrounded by his own poetic atmosphere, like a lark embowered in his crystal song, or a rose enclouded by the very scent it makes? He has sought only after truth and utility, and so failed to make his work beautiful. He might have changed life into immortality if he had kept out of these new ways which have encouraged vice and folly and must share their scourge.

'"And what's my teaching but—accept the old,
Contest the strange! acknowledge work that's done,

Misdoubt men who have still their work to do!
Religions, laws and customs, poetries
Are old? So much achieved victorious truth!
Each work was product of a life-time, wrung
From each man by an adverse world: for why?
He worked, destroying other older work
Which the world loved, and so was loth to lose,
Whom the world beat in battle—dust and ash!
Who beat the world, left work in evidence,
And wears its crown till new men live new lives,
And fight new fights, and triumph in their turn.*

'"Thus my next play shall show you a just judge examining two claimants to divine honours by having them both scourged, so as to see if either has superhuman strength. Can you say that your own favourite has borne my lashes like a god?"

'Then I said, I am only a woman, but I know that

'Some lusty armsweep needs must cause the crash
Of thorn and bramble ere those shrubs, those flowers,
We fain would have earth yield exclusively,
Are sown, matured, are garlanded for boys
And girls, who know not how the growth was gained.†

'And, since I am an ignorant foreigner, I am willing to admit that all your ridicule of the gods may not lessen the reverence felt by the Athenians. A sound and sane man is like a tree whose roots are not disturbed by the dipping of the boughs to the wind, or the light dancing of leaf and spray. And so your

* Edition 1875, p. 157. † *Ibid.* p. 164.

jesting about vice may be merely its righteous and wholesome scourge. It is hard, however, for me, a Rhodian, to understand all this, just as in those far-off western isles of mist and snow, which lie beyond the Pillars of Hercules, and yield the tin that the Phœnicians bring us, and which may yet give the world some poet who shall join the genius of Euripides with that of Aristophanes, and so be even greater than either, the natives could not easily be made to understand why we Greeks leave our statues nude, because we think that thus we show forth all the glory of the gods' own master-work. And to me, a stranger, it seems that when you say that freedom and comedy arose together in Athens, you forget that Marathon, Thermopylæ, and Salamis, made Greece free long before the comedians had left their carts and entered the theatre. Indeed your own chorus speaks as if the first comedies, worthy of being called so, were yours.

'And again, I ask you, who would improve morality, to tell me what vice has escaped its burning stigma, and what virtue failed to find all its due of praise in those tragedies which made all Greece better while you were but a boy? You prefer to attack a sin in the person of some well-known sinner; but can you say that you have thus abolished it? No, the spectators laugh just as good-naturedly over your ridicule of libertines and dema-

gogues, as they do over your jests at poets and philosophers. What strikes down sin and error will not be your pelting with mud, but the clear lightning of truth. And let me remind you how Euripides sang to Peace:—

'Come! for the heart within me dies away
So long dost thou delay!
O I have feared lest old age, much annoy,
Conquer me, quite outstrip the tardy joy.
Thy gracious triumph-season I would see,
The song, the dance, the sport, profuse of crowns to be.
But come! for my sake, goddess great and dear,
Come to the city here!*

'He did more to encourage her friends than you do, when you exhibit her charms as those of some shameless dancing-girl, or describe her privileges as those of feasting with such creatures on cheese-cakes and pancakes by the fire, while War means munching rancid salt-fish and spraining one's ankle in the snow. Is not the true hero he who cares for none of these things in comparison with his country's good? Would you have had Miltiades and Themistocles prefer cakes and dancing-girls to Marathon and Salamis? Tell me if all your pictures of the charms of Peace are likely to bring this terrible war to an end before Athens falls and freedom with her? And, finally, let me warn you, who call whatever is not white black,

* *Ibid.* p. 179.

and speak as if there was only one side to everything, that the life of liberty is truth.

'This, I say, Aristophanes, knowing that your nature is kingly, and praying that you may reign yet more royally for having purified yourself of all that is false. Nor had I dared to speak thus boldly if that other king did not stand before us in all the grand investiture of death, bidding you bow down beside my lowly head, and so making us for one moment equals.

'Then there was silence, until he burst out with :—

'"I believe that I have paid Euripides sufficient homage in hearing this. But if you would give him more, pay it by defending him, not by reproving me."

'Then I reminded him how Sophocles, but the year before, when charged by his son, also a poet, with having lost his reason, and become incapable of managing his property, defended himself by reciting one choral chant which made the rebel pale. So I made the best defence I could of Euripides by reading the play he gave me. It ends thus :—

> 'And we depart with sorrow at heart.
> Sobs that increase with tears that start ;
> The greatest of all our friends of yore,
> We have lost for evermore !'*

'"Our best friend lost!" muttered Aristophanes to himself, after a long pause. "Perhaps he may be,

* *Ibid.* p. 327.

after all, like that new sculptor who carves Pallas naked, to the horror of all the old people; but no thunderbolt strikes him, and the young men and maidens say, 'How beautiful! Wisdom formed not to be feared but loved!' This lost friend of ours has, indeed, been gazing steadily towards what is highest, but I doubt if he sees more than I do, as I turn constantly, and so look at everything, however low. As for that new poet you foretell, who is to see all things, both high and low, at once, and thus reconcile them in plays which shall be not only comedies but tragedies, so that he shall surpass me as well as Euripides, we will call him our superior when he shall be born in the Tin Islands. Meantime I must follow out my own path, for there is no failure so sad as that of the rash poet who turns out of his destined course to snatch at the crown for which some other man was born. Shall I be like Thamyris, that Thracian bard whom the Muses blinded because he dared to emulate their songs? Lend me yonder lyre, and let my hand fall for once where his has lain."

"Then he told how Thamyris went forth one autumn morning, and sang until even the ravaged trees and wizened shrubs

> '"Each, with a glory and a rapture twined
> About it, joined the rush of air and light
> And force: the world was of one joyous mind.

'Say not the birds flew! they forebore their right—
Swam, revelling onward in the roll of things.
Say not the beasts' mirth bounded! that was flight—

'How could the creatures leap, no lift of wings?
Such earth's community of purpose, such
The ease of earth's fulfilled imaginings—

'So did the near and far appear to touch
I' the moment's transport—that an interchange
Of function, far with near, seemed scarce too much;

'And had the rooted plant aspired to range
With the snake's license, while the insect yearned
To glow fixed as the flower, it were not strange—

'No more than if the fluttery tree-top turned
To actual music, sang itself aloft;
Or if the wind, impassioned chantress, earned

'The right to soar embodied in some soft
Fine form all fit for cloud-companionship,
And, blissful, once touch beauty chased so oft.

'Thamuris, marching, let no fancy slip
Born of the fiery transport; lyre and song
Were his, to smite with hand and launch from lip"—*

'So Aristophanes ran on, until his song suddenly broke up in laughter, as he said:—

'"Who chooses may tell the rest. I have not spurned the common life, nor boasted that my lyre matches that of the Muse, who sings not for men but gods. I shall not stand in her vestibule with my eyes

* *Ibid.* p. 336.

blinded, and a bright, broken lyre loose in my hand. Nay, I remain Aristophanes. There! I have sung myself back into contentment, and started a subject for my next play besides. You shall both be satisfied with it. Perhaps my last one mauled your poet too roughly, but this shall be fairness itself. I will picture the contest for the tragic crown of Euripides against Æschylus, who shall lay down the laws of tragedy, and show where your friend strayed away from them. But, yet, there shall be praise for all his many deservings, and not a bit more of the old fun. Never fear! Death makes him sacred. Your admonition has weight, too, as you shall see next year. And by that time there will be peace with Sparta, and you will own that I have not laboured in vain. Farewell, brave couple! Welcome me next year!"

'He disappeared in the grey of morning, as it dawned rose-streaked after this night, which left me rich in memories.

'The next year came, that in which Sophocles followed his dead rival to the shades. Then Aristophanes brought out the new play he promised us. It was the "Frogs." Bacchus was made to play the fool, the coward, and the liar, and suffer the scourge for it at his own feast in his theatre, and then, after all this dragging through the mire, was set up to judge between Æschylus and that chatterbox, arch-rogue, liar, and robber of the altars, as the satirist

called Euripides, whose Muse was exhibited to the spectators in all the impudence of that brazen-faced Elaphion. Then my poet's verses were literally weighed in huge balances and found too light. And, finally, he was told by the choir of Mystics that he must be punished for wasting his time in prating with Socrates. All this was so much liked that it had to be repeated again this very year; but just as the Athenians were all making merry with these Frogs, stern King Stork pounced down upon them. Lysander, the Spartan, took possession of Athens! He commanded her citizens to pull down the Long Walls which led from the city to the sea, and they promised to obey him. When they failed to do so within the time he fixed, he called his allies to hold a council with him, and said, "The wrongs we have to avenge are not transient. No disaster makes these Athenians prudent or humble. Still all their nature is false and fickle. Slight punishments are useless. Let us dig up the root of evil. They tell us that we live in huts, not houses, and that our temples are only barns. This they say because they have their Acropolis, this maze of marble arrogance. Let no man see it longer. Leave no stone upon another. Raze Athens to the rock. Make her a pasture for sheep and goats. So shall peace dwell there at last."

"'Such peace they shall have!" shouted his hearers.

'No thunderbolt fell from Jove; no sign came from Minerva; no man's argument could have stemmed that fierce surge of passion; swords were useless. But it was a choric flower that saved Athens, and my Euthucles it was who flung that flower. He stood up against all those hideous faces, and quoted the lines in which Euripides pictures the daughter of the King of Men, Electra, driven from the palace of her murdered father by her own mother, robbed of her inheritance, compelled to wed a herdsman, dressed in rags, and plunged in the meanest drudgery, yet mindful ever of the glory that was past. As a sail is rent to rags by the blast which finds its way through a single hole, so all that fury of revenge and malice was swept away by the power of this triumphant play. The Peloponnesians were grateful for such homage to their heroine, and their pity for her extended to the queenly city, which was in like manner fallen. A great shout arose—"Reverence for Electra! Let Athens stand!"

'Truly the wild-pomegranate-blossom had borne fruit at last!

'But the next day Lysander said, "Tragedy has saved Athens. Comedy shall help her to take down those walls. Let her flute-players and dancing-girls give the time to spade and pickaxe."

'It was the very day on which the Athenians won Salamis, and their trumpets called Euripides into the

world, that the Long Walls went down, Elaphion and her shameless sisters blowing their best and dancing their worst, while their admirers tore away the city's bulwarks. Euthucles and I, however, have escaped all this hideous pomp and ghastly mirth. The grey old captain whose ship I saved at Syracuse, has carried us back in it towards Rhodes, as I dictated to my husband this story of my last adventure.

'But, oh Athens, to perish thus! Why did not fire fling his resplendent arms around thee passionately, and take thee up to the Immortal Gods, folding temple by temple to his breast, until all thy white wonders faded out in ashes? Why did not the earth swallow thee, and save thy Acropolis for Persephone to rule her realm in, that the ghosts may be consoled for all the glories they have lost? Or why didst not thou, oh sea! rush in with all thy watery vastness, might upon might, and stand, face to face, with the city, thy blue waves glassing her marbled magnificence, until they blossomed into a pale tremulous flower of foam, and then, when the land could breathe again, Athens would be no more? Such a fate I could have borne! But henceforth Athens shall live in my heart, richer than those sunset clouds!'

A BLOT IN THE 'SCUTCHEON.

IT is a gala day at the country-seat of the Treshams, and Lord Thorold's retainers are dressed in their best liveries, and arranged in state to receive his neighbour, Earl Mertoun, who comes with great pomp to present himself as a suitor for the hand of Lady Mildred. There is much drinking and rejoicing among the servants; but Thorold's old warrener, Gerard, shows such sullenness and melancholy as none of his mates can understand. And this conduct is all the more strange because his master receives the Earl with the utmost cordiality, though his fondness for his sister, as well as his pride of ancestry, makes him examine her lover with the sharpest possible scrutiny.

When the high-born young wooer has departed, with the assurance that he is heartily welcomed by the family, and the promise that Mildred, whom he has not yet seen, except accidentally, according to his own story, shall at once send him word whether she is willing to hear him plead his suit in person, Thorold

is loud in praise, though his brother, Austin Tresham, and the latter's betrothed, the Lady Guendolen, think that the Earl is altogether too ready to take it for granted that Mildred will consent. This, however, she does, almost as a matter of course. Indeed, she shows such lack of curiosity about her lover, as much amazes Guendolen, who follows her cousin to her chamber, full of news which meets no welcome. All Mildred cares to know is whether Thorold has really received the Earl kindly. Guendolen is further surprised to find that, when she speaks of the young man's graceful ringlets of light hair, her cousin reminds her of the fact that it is brown. Mildred, however, cuts short the conversation as soon as she can, by repeatedly pleading that it is midnight, and she is very weary. Then, as soon as Guendolen has gone, Mildred lifts the small lamp which hangs before the Virgin's image in her painted window, and places it in front of a purple pane, saying,—'I must have sinned much that I suffer so. Mildred and Mertoun! Mildred, Mertoun's bride, with Thorold's consent and all the world's? Too late! It is sweet to think of. It would be sweeter still to hope that such a blessed end might soften the curse on our beginning. But I know it is too late! The sweetest of all would be to die in such a dream. Oh, why did sin—the serpent —glide into the paradise which Heaven meant for us?'

The window is opened softly from without, and a low voice sings:—

'There's a woman like a dew-drop, she's so purer than the purest;
And her noble heart's the noblest, yes, and her sure faith's the surest:
And her eyes are dark and humid, like the depth on depth of lustre
Hid in the harebell, while her tresses, sunnier than the wild-grape cluster,
Gush, in golden-tinted plenty down her neck's rose-misted marble:
Then her voice's music . . . call it the well's bubbling, the bird's warble!

And this woman says, "My days were sunless, and my nights were moonless,
"Parched the pleasant April herbage, and the lark's heart's outbreak tuneless,
"If you loved me not!" And I who—(ah, for words of flame!) adore her,
Who am mad to lay my spirit prostrate palpably before her,
I may enter at her portal soon, as now her lattice takes me,
And by noontide as by midnight make her mine, as hers she makes me!'*

As Earl Mertoun sings this, he enters at the window and bends over Mildred, who sits before it. Then he throws off his long cloak and slouched hat, saying, 'My very heart sings, and so I sing, beloved.'

* Act I. sc. 3, ll. 95, &c.

'Be seated, Henry; but do not take my hand'

'It is mine! The meeting that appalled us both so much is over. Now happiness begins, such as the world does not contain!'

'Do we deserve that, Henry? Tell your soul, what mine has grown used to hear, like a death-knell, once much noticed but now familiar; this will not be!'

'Oh, Mildred! have I met your brother, and compelled myself, if not to speak untruth, to disguise and put aside the truth, as nothing but you had ever prevailed upon me to stoop to? Have I at last gained that brother, the one scarer of your dreams, and sole apprehension of your waking thoughts? Does a new life break, like sunrise on our night of rain and storm? And will you not see the living blossoms and tints of flame on each dripping spray, and the inexpressible glory in the East? When I am by you, and am to be ever with you; when I have won you, and may worship you: Oh, Mildred! can you say, "This will not be?"'

'Sin has surprised us, and so will punishment,' she urges.

'No; me alone! I sinned alone!'

'The night you likened our past life too, was it all storm to you then, Henry?'

'It was your life I spoke of. What am I? what is my life to waste a thought about, when you

are by me? It was on you I meant that my folly called down the storm and night; with me it has been dawn—no, perpetual day.'

'Come what will, Henry, you have been happy. You may take my hand.'

After a pause he says,—'How good your brother is. I fancied him cold; shall I say haughty?'

'They told me all. I know it all.'

'It will soon be over, Mildred.'

'Over? What must I live through, Henry, before I can say it is over? Is our meeting over? Have I received you, before them all, with a brow which tries to seem a maiden's, with lips which make believe, as they tremble in their replies to you, that this is the nearest that ever they approached your own? O God! some prodigy of thine will stop this piece of deliberate wickedness in its very birth, some fierce spot of leprosy mar my brow's dissimulating. I shall not murmur smooth speeches got by heart, but pour forth, in frenzy, all our woeful story of love and shame; while they stand aghast, as at some accursed fountain, which should spirt water, but spouts blood. You do not wish that I should draw down this vengeance?'

'Mildred, my honour is yours. I will share such disgrace as I could not bear alone; I will tell your brother that I take back my offer. Time will yet bring some better way to save us.'

'No; I will meet their faces.'

He urges her to do so the next morning; but she pleads,—'Oh, Henry, not so soon! Let me have another day to prepare my words, and looks, and gestures. How you must despise me!'

At this he springs from his seat indignantly, and begs her to pace the chamber with him. They walk to and fro, with his arm about her, until both are calmer. Then he implores her to tell him in what limb or feature of his she sees any contempt for her, that he may pluck it off and cast it from him.

'I was scarcely a boy,' he says. 'What am I more, even now? And you were child-like when I first met you; why your hair fell loose on either side. My cheek reddens even now in recalling how it burned that morning, to see the vision of many a dream. You know how prodigal we boys are of charms to her we dream of. I had heard of you, had dreamed of you, and now I was close to you—might speak to you, might live and die your own. Who knew? I spoke. Oh, Mildred! I remembered every glance of yours, every word. I weigh them in pride's diamond scales, resolved that the treasure of my first and last love shall be bartered at its full worth. I think of your purity and utter ignorance of others' guilt, your girlish, undisguised delight at a strange prize. I, with my fancy in full growth and my reason scarcely in its germ, enjoined secresy. You had pity on my passion to sit beside you and hear you

breathe, and granted gifts, without knowing that they were so. At last I grew mad with eagerness, and must behold my beauty in her bower, or perish. I was ignorant of even my own desires, and what then were you?'

'Do you believe so, Henry? Then I scarcely grieve over the past. We will love on. You'll love me still?'

'Who would love a woman less for having injured her? Dove, whose wing I rashly hurt, shall not my heart's warmth nurse thee into strength? Flower, which I have crushed, shall I not make thee bloom above my crest? Mildred, I love you as you love me.'

'Let that be your last word. Go! I shall sleep to-night.'

'This is not our last meeting?'

'One more night, Henry.'

'And then—think!'

'Then no sweet days of courtship for us; no dawning of love; no innocent hopes and fears, reserves, and confidences. Morning is over.'

'How else, Mildred, could love's perfect noontide follow? All that the dawn promised the day shall perform?'

'It may be so. You are cautious, love? You are sure that you have scaled the walls without being noticed?'

'Trust me. So our final meeting is fixed for to-morrow night? Farewell.'

When he has departed she says to herself, as she is wont to do every night before she tries to sleep, 'I was so young; I loved him so much; I had no mother. God forgot me, and I fell. There may be pardon yet, but all is doubt. Surely the bitterness of death is past.'

The next morning Gerard, who has been already spoken of as one of Lord Tresham's retainers, and who has served the family most faithfully for sixty years, as his father and grandfather had done before him, comes to tell his master that every night for the past month he has seen a man, muffled in a long cloak and wearing a sword, climb the great yew-tree under the Lady Mildred's window, which he enters at midnight, when a signal is made by moving a lamp up to a purple pane. Thorold asks him why he has not sent a shaft from his cross-bow through the marauder, and Gerard answers, 'But, my lord, the first time he was seen he came out in a great moonlight, bright as any day, from Lady Mildred's chamber. Oh, Lord Thorold! let me speak all that is on my mind. Since I first noted all this I have groaned as if a fiery net plucked me this way and that. It was fire to turn to you; fire to turn to her; fire to lay me down and strive to die. The lady could not have been seven years old when I was trusted to lead her through the

herd of deer, to stroke the snow-white fawn, which I brought within a month to eat bread from her tiny hand. She always had a smile to greet me with. Oh! if lopping each limb from this trunk could undo what is done! Heaven itself could not compel me to hurt her; but when I held my peace, every morsel of your food eaten under your roof, where I was born, seemed to choke me. This morning I thought I must tell you or die. Now it is done I seem the vilest worm that crawls for having betrayed my lady.'

When the good old man has left Lord Tresham, he is tortured by doubt whether he should trust in his story or his sister's purity. At last he sends for her by Guendolen, whom he bids wait with Austin in the gallery close to his library. His agitation is so great that his cousin suspects that he must have found some blot in the Earl's escutcheon.

He begins by asking Mildred what love is best of all, and as she speaks of father's, mother's, and husband's, tells her that a brother's love for his sister surpasses all other passions in its unselfishness. No alloy of earth stains that perfect gold. The brother has never done anything for his sister which gives him any claim over her except that which belongs to pure love. And this will never be returned so warmly as when they hunted for cowslips in the woods, or played together in the meadow hay. Nor can he look forward to anything in the future but to being de-

throned by some stranger. So a brother's love must be best of the world of loves in its unworldliness. Each day and hour spins a web of hopes, fears, and fancies, around all the sister's daily life. Will Mildred let her brother tear this web apart? She bids him speak freely, and then he asks her if any one could tell any story of her which she would conceal, and assures her that he is willing to believe her, though he must disbelieve all the world. She is silent, though he implores her to lift some of the miserable weight which presses him almost into his grave. He waits breathlessly for the least hint of a defence; but she can make none, not even when, after a long pause, he asks her if she admits a lover to her chamber night after night. Thorold bids her name him, and she says that she is willing to make any expiation for her sin, but she will not incur new guilt, and so she cannot tell his name. Then he says that he is ready to hide her shame and his from every eye, and let her wed her gallant above her mother's tomb; but to-morrow the Earl is coming without suspicion, and she must dictate a letter taking back the permission to woo her, which had been sent him the night before. Mildred, however, insists on receiving Mertoun.

Then Thorold calls in Austin and Guendolen to hear him denounce his sister for trying to inveigle an innocent youth into marriage in order to keep her paramour. All else he could have borne, but now he

curses her to her face, and prays that shame may hunt her from the earth and Heaven judge her. At this she faints and he rushes out. Austin wishes to follow and take his betrothed with him, for he thinks Mildred unworthy of looking at them; but Guendolen says, 'If you and I, Austin, thought so on reflection, if you, bound to serve the king, and make his cause yours, whether others think it right or wrong, should leave a dying woman thus, not to speak of your sister, of Mildred; if I, her cousin, who was her friend this morning, and her playfellow only yesterday, who have offered to serve her a thousand times, should now show that I only meant that I would help her as long as she was able to take care of herself, and while fifty eyes were waiting for her look, and a whole ring of lives standing between her and insult; if we said and did so, Mildred would not be unworthy of beholding us, but we should be unworthy of being looked at by—by the meanest of your dogs; for if that sword were broken in your face, that badge torn from your breast before a crowd, and you hooted off, he would push his way through the hooters to your side, and follow you and all your shame to whatever ditch you chose to die in. Austin, do you love me? Mildred, here's Austin; here is your brother, who says he does not believe half of what he heard. Look up and take his hand.'

'Take my hand, dear Mildred,' he says.

Guendolen assures her that they are both waiting to do her bidding, and that by just such a beginning the world has many a time been won. Finally, when they are alone together, she succeeds in finding out who the lover is, and is much comforted by the discovery, of which she at once sends word by Austin to Thorold.

The latter, however, is not to be found. He has left the house, and all that day he wanders about in the forest, where he tries in vain to lose himself. He traverses glades, and follows bushy paths which used to lead him into the depths of the wild woods and bewilder his adventurous steps in boyhood. Now they all take him back, sooner or later, to the yew-tree under Mildred's window. The blackest shade breaks up before him; the throng of tree-trunks opens wide, and the very river itself seems to put its arm about him and lead him to that detested spot. The dim turret he has fled from again and again stands fronting him once more as the bell strikes midnight. Then he remembers that this is the hour when Mildred's lover comes. He thinks he knows what the river and the woods mean to have him do, and resolves to obey them.

He hides himself behind the great tree, and Mertoun soon comes up, full of hope that he may yet make Mildred happy, and pluck out, thorn by thorn, every trace of the rough, forbidden path into which

his rash love lured her. Each day some fear is to be effaced and some hope renewed. He sees the lamp placed behind the purple pane, and thinks that Mildred's star has never beamed lovelier than now, as it rises for the last time, and that, when it sets, their sun will dawn. He is about to climb the tree, but Thorold seizes his arm, clutches him by the throat, and drags him into the moonlight, asking furiously for his name.

'Are you silent?' he says. 'You bear yourself exactly as felons of your class have looked in my dreams. I have fancied that the bravo would keep a bold face, and the thief be voluble and plausible, but the slave of lust would crouch in silence. Your name, I tell you!'

Mertoun entreats him, for his own sake, to forbear to ask it, and pleads, 'As heaven is above us, your future weal or woe depends on my silence. Vain! I read your white, inexorable face. Know me, Lord Tresham!'

He throws off his disguise. There is a moment of silence. Then Thorold bids him draw his sword, and refuses to listen to his prayer to be allowed to speak. Only threats of spitting in the Earl's face and stamping on his mouth force him at last to draw. Even then he makes no attempt to return or parry Thorold's thrusts, under which he soon falls, saying, 'You will hear me now; and what gives a man such a right to speak his defence to his fellow-man as the fact that

presently he will have leave to speak it all before his God?'

'You are not hurt? It cannot be!' exclaims the homicide. 'Where did my sword reach you? How young he is!'

'Lord Tresham, I am very young, and yet I have entangled other lives with mine. Do let me speak, and believe me, that when I die before you presently ——'

'Can you live until I return with help?'

'Oh, stay with me! When I was only a boy I did you a grievous wrong; but I did not know it; on my honour I did not. When I did, I could not find a better way to right you than that I took. Giving you the life that you have taken would have been nothing to me. I thought my way better, but only for her sake and yours. You have decided otherwise, and I would I had an infinity of lives to offer you. Can you tell me how to make out a reparation from the minutes I have left? Oh, think of this! I must wring—dare I say it—a forgiveness from you before I die!'

'I forgive you.'

'Ponder that great word; because if you do forgive me I shall hope to speak of—of Mildred.'

'Mertoun, haste and anger have undone us. It is not you who should speak of being young and thoughtless. Only grant me a pardon as ample as mine is.'

'O, Tresham, that all this should be brought about by a sword-stroke and a drop or two of blood! Why, it was my very fear of you that ruined me. I dreamed of you, the all-accomplished scholar, the gentleman courted everywhere. I burned to knit myself to you; but I was young, and your surpassing reputation kept me aloof. If I had loved you less, my glorious yesterday of praise and gentle looks, might have taken place six months ago, and how happy we should now have been. I know you did not think of this, Tresham. Let me look into your face. I feel that it is changed; but my eyes are glazed. Where are you?' As he strives to rise, he catches sight of the lamp and exclaims: 'Ah, Mildred! What will Mildred do? Tresham, her life is bound up in that which is bleeding away so fast. I will live! I must! There! if you will only turn me, I shall live and save her. O, Tresham, if you had only listened! What right had you to set your foot thoughtlessly on her life and mine? We sinned, and we die. Never do you sin, Lord Tresham, for you'll die, and God will judge you.'

'Yes. He has begun to do so,' is the answer.

'And she sits there waiting for me. Now, do you say this to her—you and no one else—say I saw him die, as he said, "I love you." You don't know what these three little words mean. Say that loving her lowers me down the bloody slope to death with

memories——I must speak to her, not to you. Die with me, dear Mildred! It is so easy, and you'll escape so much unkindness. Can I lie at rest with rude speeches spoken to you, and ruder deeds done, be aware, perhaps, of every blow and yet have no power to slay the felon? Die, Mildred! Leave their honourable world to them! We are good enough for God, though the world casts us out.'

Here Gerard's whistle is heard. Thorold calls him, and he, Austin, and Guendolen enter with torches. They try to explain how they had intended to prevent bloodshed, but Lord Tresham will not let them speak.

'You see what is done,' he says. 'I cannot bear another voice.'

'There's light, light, all about me!' exclaims the dying lad. 'And I move to it. Tresham, did you not promise to deliver words of mine to Mildred?'

'I will bear them.'

As they raise young Mertoun he breathes his last, saying, 'I knew they turned me. Do not turn me from her!'

Thorold goes to the chamber of his heart-broken sister with a pale cheek and feeble steps, takes a seat beside her, and begins to talk of the time when they waded after water-lilies, and suddenly plunged in so deep that they could neither advance nor turn back, but stood laughing and crying until Gerard came;

and then, when once they were safe on the turf, she was the loudest for still gaining the prize. He calls her by her name, so tenderly that she asks him why he does so, and he answers, 'I am sorry that I took an office which was not mine this morning. Of course I could not but be glad or grieved at every little thing that touched you. I might have reproved you with a wrung heart. I did more. Will you pardon me?'

'Are you mocking me, Thorold? You bid me say that word!'

'Forgive me! Are you silent, Mildred?'

Then she starts up and asks, 'Why does not Henry Mertoun come to-night? Are you silent too?' She dashes aside his mantle and points to the empty scabbard, 'Ah, this speaks for you! You have murdered him! What is it I must pardon? This and all? Well, I do forgive you, Thorold; I think I do. How very wretched you must be!'

'He bade me tell you——'

'I forbid you to utter it. You may tell me how you killed him. But must I hear from you that he never loved me better than when he was bleeding out his life? And must I say, "Indeed," to that? Enough. I forgive you!'

'You cannot, Mildred, except for the harsh words. Of this last deed Another is judge, and I await His doom in doubt and fear.'

'There is nothing for me to forgive, Thorold. You have freed my soul from all its cares. Death makes me sure of him for ever. You shall not tell me his last words; he shall tell them himself, and read my answer in my heart.'

'Death! Mildred? Are you dying, too? Guendolen said you would.'

'Tell her that I loved her; and tell Austin——'

'That you love him also—and me?'

'Ah, Thorold, were you not rash in quenching that blood on fire, with youth, and hope, and love of me, whom you loved, and yet suffered to sit here waiting for him while you were slaying him? Doubtless you let him speak his poor, confused, boyish speech, and do his utmost to disarm your wrath. You let him try to tell our story—the brief madness, and the long despair. Your code of honour bids you hear before you strike.'

'No, no!' answers her brother. 'If I had only let him tell half the truth, I should have spared him. Why, as he lay there, with the moonlight on his flushed cheek, I gathered all the story without his telling it. Beneath the troubled surface of his fault I saw a serene depth of purity. If I had only glanced at it before! I would not, and my punishment is at hand. There is the truth, Mildred. Do you curse me?'

'As I dare to approach that Heaven, which bids

no living thing despair, which needs no code to keep its grace stainless, but pleads with the vilest thing that turns on it, to cease and be forgiven, I do not pardon you, my brother, but bless you from my very soul.' She throws her arms about his neck, and says:—'There, do not think too much on the past. The cloud which was between my friend and you has broken up. You hurt him under its shadow, but is that past retrieving? I have his heart, you know, and may dispose of it. I give it to you. He loves you as I do. Confirm it, Henry!'

She is lying dead in Thorold's arms, when Guendolen and Austin enter, and find him sinking under something besides her weight. He has taken poison, feeling that earth has nothing more for him, and that the life is gone out of all things.

'Here is my hand, Austin,' he says; 'put yours into it; yours, too, Guendolen. You are Lord and Lady now; you are the Treshams. Name and fame are yours. Hold up our escutcheon, brother! No blot on it. The first blot came, and so did the first blood to wash it away. To the world all is gules again!'

'No blot shall come,' answers Austin.

'I said that, and yet it came. If another comes, vengeance is God's, not man's. Remember me.'

And only his memory is left them.

THE RING AND THE BOOK.

THE book referred to is composed, as Browning says, of printed briefs and manuscript letters, to which he applied a process like that of the Roman jewellers, who make an unusually delicate ring by alloying the thread of gold until it will bear file and hammer, and, after these tools have done their work, cleanse away the dross with acids, so as to leave the shape perfect. Thus was created the poem which is dedicated thus :—

'O lyric Love, half angel and half bird,
And all a wonder and a wild desire,—
Boldest of hearts that ever braved the sun,
Took sanctuary within the holier blue,
And sang a kindred soul out to his face,—
Yet human at the red-ripe of the heart—
When the first summons from the darkling earth
Reached thee amid thy chambers, blanched their blue,
And bared them of the glory—to drop down
To toil for man, to suffer or to die,—
This is the same voice: can thy soul know change?
Hail, then, and hearken from the realms of help!
Never may I commence my song, my due
To God, who best taught song by gift of thee,
Except with bent head and beseeching hand—

That still, despite the distance and the dark,
What was, again may be ; some interchange
Of grace, some splendour once thy very thought,
Some benediction anciently thy smile :
—Never conclude, but raising hand and head
Thither where eyes, that cannot reach, yet yearn
For all hope, all sustainment, all reward,
Their utmost up and on,—so blessing back
In those thy realms of help, that heaven thy home,
Some whiteness which, I judge, thy face makes proud,
Some wanness where, I think, thy foot may fall!' *

The story opens about two hundred years ago in Rome, and among the actors are two married people, named Pietro and Violante Comparini. Their rank was humble, their reputation good, and their residence situated near the Pincian Hill, in the Via Villoria, which runs out of the Corso. They also owned a lonely little suburban villa, situated in the Pauline district, and meant for jaunts and jollity ; and Pietro had, during his life, the interest from a sum of money, by which his children would be benefited in the same way ; though, if he should die childless, this income would pass out of the family to other heirs. His contented and easy disposition joined with Violante's stirring and striving one, made such a union as ensures health of body and peace of mind. They lived a gay and careless life, Pietro's soul satisfied when his cronies told him there was no wine so good

* Book I. ll. 1391, &c.

as that which he drank every day, and his wife's heart swelling her bodice with joy as she saw her neighbours turn their heads wistfully, and sigh after the load of lace which she carried into church. Indeed, they indulged themselves so freely that, by the time they reached fifty, they were obliged to ask for a share of the monthly dole given out in secret by the Pope to the shamefaced poor. Meantime, debts increased and creditors grew importunate, knowing how little money the fat, rosy, easy man would leave behind him. Pietro and Violante now felt more deeply than ever what had previously been their only trouble, namely, their lack of children. But at last, in 1680 or '81, she told him, with a smile, and a blush, that her prayers had been heard, and in due time he might expect an heir. She did not tell him of the shameful bargain she had just made with a washerwoman, who was soon to be the mother of a base-born babe.

This child was tenderly brought up, as their daughter Pompilia, by these two ignoble people, who did their best—partly in God's way and partly in another way than His—to scramble somehow through the world's mud, careless how much they were splashed themselves, provided that they could hold their child high above the mire, and keep her soul white enough for all the three. Pietro and Violante learned to save money, and their creditors left them in peace, thinking that the income from the trust-fund

would not be forfeited by his dying childless. Both were wrapped up in their love of the strange, tall, pale, beautiful creature, who grew up before them, as does the lily in the legend, to bow its white, miraculous birth of buds before the Virgin. Pompilia herself said that, up to her marriage, her thirteen years were each day as happy as the day was long.

These thirteen years of Pompilia's childhood were scarcely ended when, one afternoon, as Pietro was taking his siesta and Pompilia embroidering in her own chamber, Violante received a visit from a priest, of smooth manners, soft speech, and sleek face, who introduced himself as the Abate Paolo, younger brother of Count Guido Franceschini, a nobleman of Tuscany, now for many years a resident at Rome. Paolo kept brushing his broad-brimmed hat and setting aright his silk stockings, but never loosed the hold of his sharp grey eyes upon Violante, as he told her of the high rank and ancient grandeur of their family, who were no longer rich, considering their station, but yet not so very poor. They still kept the old palace, now rather dilapidated, in Arezzo, and they had also their wild, breezy villa, on the hillside at Vittiano. His brother was so fond of these that he insisted on giving up all his prospects in Rome, though he had a patron there who was Cardinal, and might yet do much for the family: Guido had lost his ambition, however, and began to pine for his old

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home. And thither he wished to take a wife, who need not have great wealth or high rank—his own being sufficient—but must be tender, faithful, and young enough to take up willingly a new mode of life. Paolo had heard what a lily of a maiden Pompilia was, and he now asked for her formally as Count Guido's wife. This he said, kissed Violante's hand devoutly, rose to his full height, and went forth grandly, as if the Pope were coming next.

The woman rubbed her eyes awhile, and then ran to wake her husband and tell him how their child was to be a Countess. She was all the more joyful for a reason which she could not tell him. Her conscience had often troubled her for passing off Pompilia as her daughter, and here seemed a way thrown open by God Himself, to give her a place which should really be her own. As she told the girl afterwards, she fancied that the finger of God was pointing out the time when this slip of wild briar, which she had plucked to love and wear, should be planted in soil where it could live on its own roots, and get to be what it would be called. Pietro was rather sorry at the prospect of losing his daughter, but soon he recovered his cheerfulness, took his cane and periwig, and sallied forth pompously into the Piazza di Spagna, to receive congratulations from his friends who were lounging there at the fountain. Everybody laughed at him, and told him that Count Guido was fifty years

old and wretchedly poor, and that he certainly cared for nothing about the girl except her money. Violante was accordingly informed by her husband that the marriage was out of the question. She pretended to submit, but carried on her own plan in secret, as Pompilia shall tell us.

'When Violante first told me that the cavalier whom she would bring the next morning to me, and whom I must let kiss my hand, would be at our church that same evening to marry me, but that afterwards we should go home without him, and then, until she gave me leave to speak, I must hold my tongue, for this is the proper behaviour for girlish brides, whose fathers would blush at their talking, why, I saw no more sense in what she said than a lamb does in people's clipping its wool. And when, the next morning, my cavalier proved to be Guido Franceschini, old, hook-nosed, and yellow, not so tall as I was myself, and looking very much like an owl, why, the uncomfortableness of it all seemed hardly more important than if a coin had been given me to spend, and I knew that, whether it was new or old, grimy or glaring, I could get grapes and figs for it just the same. Here marriage was a dirty piece of money, with which I could buy the praise of those I loved.' I hardly knew what a husband meant, and supposed that this man would not serve one whit the worse for being so uncouth; just as, once, when I was ill, and a

doctor, with a great ugly hat which had no plume on it, a white, sharp beard, and such a sour, austere face, came and dropped into my mouth a black, bitter drop or two and cured me, what mattered the fierce beard or grim face? The cure beautified the man.

'So I was hurried through a storm—how it rained! —in the dark evening of December's deadest day, through our street and the bit of Corso, cloaked around and covered up close as if I was something contraband, into our church of San Lorenzo, up the empty aisle, my mother—for I must still call Violante so—keeping such tight hold of me that I fancied we were come to see a corpse before the altar, towards which she pulled me. 'On it shivered two tapers, instead of the customary blaze and warmth, and before it we found waiting a disagreeable priest; not our friendly pastor, but a stranger, with mischief-making eyes and mouth, Paolo, whom I know since, to my cost. I heard the heavy church-door lock out help behind us.

'"Quick! Lose no time!" cried Paolo, and out from behind the altar, where he had hidden, stepped Guido, with his hawk-nose and yellow face, caught my hand, and there I was in the chancel, and the priest had opened his book. He read here and there, made me say this and that, and then told me that I was now a wife, honoured indeed, since Christ honours his spouse, the Church, He who turned water into wine,

to show that I should obey my husband like Christ. Then the two men slipped aside and talked apart. I got down again, silent and scared, and joined my mother, who was weeping. No one seemed to notice us any longer, and we found our way on tiptoe to the door, which by this time was unlocked and wide open. The rain had stopped, and all things looked better. Before our own house Violante whispered, "Not one syllable to your father, girl; brides never talk."

'He opened the door for us and shouted, "Well treated with a wetting, you draggle-tails! You almost made me brave the gutter's roaring sea, and carry off both the doves, the old one and the young one, like a kite, from their roost in the church. What do these priests mean by praying people to death such stormy afternoons, when Christmas is close at hand, to wash away our sins without any need of the rain?"

'Violante gave my hand a timely squeeze, so I said nothing, but kissed him quietly, being a bride. For the next three weeks I saw nothing more of Guido, and thought, "Neither does the Church see Christ; and so, since my illness, I have not seen that ugly doctor. Just as I was cured, so I am married. Neither scarecrow will return. How my playmates would stare, and smile, and laugh outright!" But one morning, as I sat and sang alone at the embroidery frame, I heard loud voices, two or three together, sobs, too, and my name. "Guido!" "Paolo!" flung

to and fro like stones. I ran in to see. There stood Guido himself, and that very priest, with his sly face formal, but not at all afraid, while Pietro was all red and angry, and seemed scarcely able to stutter out his wrath. Violante was weeping at his telling her, "You have murdered us all, yourself, and me, and our child besides."

'Then Guido broke in with, "Murdered or not, it is enough that your child is now my wife, and I am come to take her."

'But Paolo said to Pietro, "Consider, kinsman—if I may call you so—what is the good of your sagacity, except to give advice in such a strait as this? I guarantee that the parties are man and wife, whether you like it or loath it, bless or ban. May spilt milk be put back into the bowl? Better scrub the marble floor with it than sigh about the syllabub that is wasted. Better predispose the groom to grace the bride with favour from the first, than force him to begin married life an embittered man."

'He smiled, knowing that the game was wholly in his hands.

'Faster and faster sobbed Violante. "Ay, all of us murdered! No help now! Oh my sin! Oh my secret!"

'Then I began to guess the truth. Something underhand and false had happened. My mother was to be blamed and I to be pitied, I whom all

spoke of, but to whom no one spoke. I stood mute —the chattel which had caused a crime.

'At last Pietro cried, "Withdraw, my child. You do not need to have the victim by while you discuss the value of her blood. For her sake I consent to hear you speak. Go, my daughter, and pray God to help the innocent."

'I did go, and was praying, when in came poor Violante, her eyes swollen and red enough, but her mouth making believe that matters were somehow getting right again. She bade me sit down by her side and said, "You are too young to understand, and at first your father did not. I wished to benefit all three of us, and when he failed to take my meaning, I thought it best to have my own way without his knowing it. It is just as if I had given him wholesome food, when he asked for broken victuals, and as soon as he noticed any difference he had flung the plate out of the window and fallen to blaming me. This is men's way, my child. But either you have prayed away his obstinacy, or I have talked him back into his senses. Paolo, too, did wonders in persuading him; a priest is more of a woman than a man. Guido was not of much help. In short, your father sees and says that he was wrong. My plan was worth trying, and it bears fruit; it gives you a noble name, a palace, and no end of pleasant things. What do you care about a handsome

young man? They are volatile and forget their wives. This is the kind of man to keep the house. We do not lose our daughter; we gain a son; that is all. It is agreed that we shall never separate, but join our fortunes, share and share alike, and we three die together as we have lived. Only it will be at Arezzo, a Tuscan town, not so large as this noisy Rome, doubtless, but far older, and much finer, people say, and in a great palace, where you will be queen, and know the Archbishop and the Governor; and we shall see homage done to you before we die. So be good, and pardon me!"

'"Pardon for what?" I answered. "You know all about it; I am very ignorant. All is right, if you only will not cry."

'Then she kissed me hard and hot, and led me back to where Pietro leaned against the wall opposite to Guido, who stood eying him, as the butcher looks at the fallen, panting ox, who feels that his fate is coming, and struggles no more. Paolo looked on archly, pricked his brows with the point of his pen, and said, "Count Guido, take your lawful wife until death part you." All since is one blank, a terrific dream.'

Pietro and Violante had been persuaded by Paolo not only to give up Pompilia's dowry, but to renounce all they had and held,—houses and fields, goods and chattels, and even the income from the trust fund—in

favour of Guido, who in return undertook to support the aged couple at Arezzo. Thus ran the marriage articles, which had been revised by Guido's patron, the Cardinal. The Comparini went accordingly to Arezzo, and found that they had been woefully deceived. They were obliged to dwell, like ghosts in a sepulchre, under a black heap of stones, the disgrace of the street, grimmest as that was in the gruesome town, and there pick garbage from off pewter plates, or cough over vinegar, dribbled out of earthenware. They had given up their neighbours, and their daily feasts, and in return they got cruelty and insult, dealt out, dose after dose, at bed and board, the Count's aged mother working for his schemes steadily and pitilessly. One of the few visitors, the Canon Conti, saw the two poor, old, frightened, family spectres, crouching close together in a corner, like mouse huddled against mouse in the cat's cage, and this gave him such a turn that afterwards he stayed away. They made complaint whenever they had a chance, but found no one to help them. They went before the Governor himself, but he told them that the next time they came to him with any lies against his friend they should be punished for it. He even threatened to put them into jail as felons, because Pompilia, as she saw that they, who had never let her want a nosegay, wanted bread, gave them back a trinket or two of which they had formerly made her a

gift. Four months of terror and torture made them glad to save their lives as best they could. They gave up all their property to Guido, as he meant that they should do, abandoned their child, and fled back to Rome, to beg their living from their former neighbours and boon-companions.

Soon after, in 1695, the Pope proclaimed a jubilee, at which there should be prompt pardon for light offences, and no rough dealing with even great crimes. Violante muffled up herself more than ever before, mixed with the crowd that made for St. Peter's, marched through the great door broken open for the occasion, fell into file with poisoners and parricides, and in her turn reached the pale, shrinking confessor, who was set at this sink-hole for all the world to help the frightfullest of filth find its outlet. There she knelt down and whispered in his ear how she had bought the girl and passed her off for her daughter, first on Pietro, and then on Guido; and how the next heirs to the trust-fund would be defrauded. The priest told her that she could not be forgiven until she made a full disclosure to all whom she had wronged; and such a confession she accordingly made in open court, appealing to six surviving witnesses in proof that at last she told the truth. This she did all the more willingly because she and Pietro hoped thus to recover their Pompilia as well as their property, for they expected that Guido would ask for a divorce,

and that the courts would pronounce not only the marriage, but the articles which had enabled him to beggar them, null and void. The Count, however, maintained that both the marriage and the settlement were valid, since he had been simply a victim to Violante's fraud. The judgment permitted him to retain his wife and her dowry, but annulled his claim to the rest of the property of Pietro, for he had also been innocently deceived. Neither he nor Guido was satisfied with this compromise, and the lawsuits went on.

Guido's representative at Rome, of course, was Paolo, who, in answer to the complaints of cruel treatment at Arezzo, published by Pietro and Violante, produced a letter written to him by Pompilia, declaring that their departure had made a change like that from hell to heaven, and accusing them with advising her to take a gallant and fly with him to them at Rome after she had poisoned her husband and his family, robbed the house, and set it on fire. She could neither read nor write, however, and the Count finally confessed that he had made her follow with a pen the characters which he had traced.

The crime just described he hoped to drive her to attempt, that thus he might get rid of a companion whom he loathed, and yet keep her dowry. Pompilia suffered so much, not only from his cruelty and sensuality, but also from the lawless love of his younger

brother, Canon Girolamo, whose insolence the husband left unchecked, that she fled to the palace of the Archbishop, hid her face on his feet, and told him more than she could let her mother know. He chid her for making his gout worse, derided her scruples, told her that it was her Christian duty to submit to her husband in all things, and sent her back to him. Three times she went to the prelate, and begged him to take pity on her, but in vain. Next she tried to get help from the Governor, who had been so cruel to her parents, but fared no better than they did. At last she happened to confess herself to a poor friar, who wept and crossed himself to hear how foully she was treated, and how sorely she was tempted to kill herself. She saw the man within the monk, and said, 'You are the only one in all the world to save me; will you do it? I cannot even write my woes, nor can I hire anybody to do so. I do not own a single coin, or an hour of liberty. I was watched to church, am watched now, and shall be watched back again presently. Pray write down what need there is that my parents should take me away, and send it to them.'

So he let her dictate a letter, running thus:—

'Dear Friends, who used to be my parents, and now declare that you have no part in me, I cannot solve this riddle. It must be that you love me as much as ever; and even if you do not, I had rather have your hate, than any love I find here. Take me away and hate me as you do the scorpions. How I shall rejoice!'

This he wrote; but sober, second thoughts reminded him that the Archbishop had thought it best not to interfere, and that Uzzah was struck dead for trying to steady the Ark of God. He said to himself, that it was the Divine will that married life should be full of troubles, from which the holier state of celibacy was free. So he tore up the letter, and gave his penitent only his prayers. Thus she passed three dreary years in the dreadful palace.

There was also in Arezzo a young priest, of dauntless courage and comely features, named Giuseppe Caponsacchi. His family was nobler than Guido's; his skill in composing and singing madrigals and sonnets famous, his authority at cards and in the fashions absolute, and his popularity boundless with the ladies, as well as with his clerical superiors. These latter had made light of the scruples which at first caused him to shrink from taking vows he could not keep, and told him that the Church no longer needed martyrs but decorators—the Church who did not wish him to renounce the world, but to bring it to her feet. After three or four years under such guidance he found himself one evening during the Carnival at the theatre, in company with a brother canon, the Conti already mentioned. He saw a tall, beautiful, and sad young lady, who was a stranger to him, enter, and remembered how once, as he was yawning through matins in the cathedral, he saw workmen bring in a

box, set it up behind the high altar, break away a board or two; and lo! when next he looked, there was a Raphael! He was still lost in gazing, when Canon Conti brought her to turn her sad smile on them by tossing a twisted paper of bonbons into her lap.

'This,' said he, 'is my new cousin, whose heart that scapegrace, Guido Franceschini, is breaking. See how he scowls at us. I was a fool to fling those candies.'

After this Caponsacchi ceased to care for writing sonnets, visiting the ladies, or feasting with the Archbishop, who feared that his pupil was turning heretic, because he had grown so devout. And now comes that portion of our story of which this young priest is the hero, and of which the best account is in his own words:—

'One evening I was sitting over my Thomas Aquinas, thinking how my life had broken away under me, and shown the gap between what I was and what I should be, and regretting that I, with so much strength, craving employment, was unable to help that pale, sad lady, who needed aid so much. Yes, this was eating into my heart. Out of the printed page her smile kept glowing, and I could not break the silence. There was a tap on the chamber-door, then a whisper, and, at my summons, in glided a masked and muffled mystery, and laid lightly on my open book a letter, telling how she, to whom I

(as it pretended) flung the candy, had a warm heart to give me, and would be glad to have me visit her that night, when her surly husband would be at his villa. I knew at once that the letter was not written by the Countess, just as I should have known that a low-browed beadle lied, if he brought me a scorpion transfixed on his rod and said, "See what Raphael made! This reptile came out of the mouth of his Madonna yonder."

'Accordingly, I wrote back:—

'"No more of this! I know you are beautiful, but other thoughts now occupy me. Once I should not have been so cold. What made you, if one may ask it, marry your hideous husband? It was a fault, and now you are punished for it. Farewell!"'

'"There," said I, "Guido may make what he can out of this."

'Other letters followed thick and fast. They were slipped under my door, and one dropped before my feet as I passed the window which had been pointed out as hers. Words were written in my prayer-book, and signs made me in the church. At every corner the shameless messenger met me with the same invitation. Again and again I refused, but not so positively as to leave no hope of my yielding in the end. At last I grew tired of the foul, teasing lie, and one April morning, when a letter came, saying that Guido had found out his wife's passion for me,

and I had better keep away from her window, I wrote back that I would come that very evening. And thither I went, expecting nothing but a chance to cudgel him as he deserved.'

When Pompilia returned from the theatre her husband had threatened to kill her for attracting Caponsacchi's admiration. The waiting-woman kept praising the priest, pleading in his name, and bringing sonnets and love-letters, which she said were from him, and tried to read to her lady; but the latter snatched them away, and tore them into shreds, or burnt them, feeling sure that they were forged. Again and again Guido drew his sword on his wife, or pretended to give her poison, for thus he hoped to frighten her into a shameful flight with the priest. More and more furious he became, professedly because he was jealous, but, in reality, because he could find no ground for being so. She grew desperate, and begged Conti, as well as another priest and kinsman of hers, named Guillichini, to take her to Rome. Both refused, Conti saying, that he had rather face a dog twice Guido's size, and that nobody dared brave the monster except Caponsacchi.

On the night of April 19th she went to sleep, careless how long she lived, glad that another day was done and she so much nearer death, and almost ready to pray for leave to die. The next morning she sprang up at the vivid daybreak, and found light

within her and around her, and everywhere a change. A broad, yellow sunbeam fell like a drawbridge from heaven, the winds shook diamonds from the eaves, bird after bird leaped by full of song, and her heart sang, 'I, too, am to go away. I, too, have something to care about—yes, something to carry with me to Rome. As the bird brings sticks, and hair, and wool to but one place in all the world, so I have my purpose and my march to Rome. Last night I was willing to let my husband do all he threatened. Now my life is charmed. Yesterday I could but for the sin have dared any deed against myself; now see if I will touch one unripe fruit. Not to live now would be wickedness; and life means making haste to go to Rome.'

Accordingly, when the servant came to talk about Caponsacchi as usual, she sent him word to come to her window after the 'Ave Maria' that very evening. All that day she prayed to God, and remembered how miracles saved His virgins in ancient days. At last, when she knew that it was time for a star to be born, she stepped out upon her balcony and saw her friend's silent, solemn face below. Then she said, 'Sir, I have read none of the letters brought me, as if from you, by a woman, one of the people in whose power I am. I can neither read nor write. She tells me, making me listen against my will, that you, a priest, dare to love me, a wife. It

cannot be that you mean what she says. Such wickedness would be deadly to us both; but good; true love would help me now so much; and I tell myself that you may mean this. You offer me much money because I am starving; but it only needs one piece to save my life. The silver cup on the altar is neither yours to give nor mine to take; but I might eat one piece of bread from the plate and do no harm, for I am starving. I am in such distress that I may not refuse so much help as brings no guilt on either you or me. But not one bit of superfluous aid! Let me tell my story, and even, if you have been fevered with fancy, you will become healthy, and care to bestow only what I can take.

'I was dwelling happily in Rome with those dear Comparini, who called themselves my father and mother. All at once I found I had become wife to Count Guido, and he—if he really was a man—changed, without waiting for a moment, into a fury of fire. He laid on me a hand which burned away all peace, joy, and hope, and at last all fear, dipping the blossoming bough of life into flame, which shrivelled up not only the present but the past. The two dear ones, who kept up all the old love to me here, were so tortured by him and his people that they fled away; and now they have cast me off, and said that I never was their child. For a long while I have suffered the agonies of death. I sought help from the

Archbishop and the Governor. I asked the friar who confessed me two months ago to write to my parents for me. It has all been in vain. While only my death was threatened I bowed my head, ready to have my husband strike. Now I peril something else, something more truly me than this myself, something I trust in God and you to save. They tell me that you are going to Rome; take me there, as you would a dog you found maltreated; take me home, and leave me where my father and mother dwell. Soon they'll come to know their child once more.'

He answered the first words she ever heard from his lips—'I am yours.'

It was agreed that he should engage the carriage and meet her the next evening. All that night he paced the city, the whole of his old life passed away. In the grey of dawn he found himself facing the pillared front of his own church, Santa Maria della Pieve. The Church seemed to say, 'Am I not the bride to whom thou didst plight thy troth? Let the free bestow their life-blood. Thou art bound.'

Day after day he had left his stall at the signal waved him by some foolish fan, cursing the prostrate monk he stumbled over, or at best smiling at him, and the Church had seemed to encourage him. Now, when first he found out what to live and die for, from those stony lips came a voice, sighing, 'Leave that live passion. Come and be dead with me.'

It was as if he had picked berries in the garden of the Hesperides undisturbed, but as soon as he saw the apple of perfect gold, he saw also the dragon on the watch. He thought he must obey the Church, for this seemed the self-sacrifice which God required. He went home and opened Thomas Aquinas again, but the book blazed with only one name on the white page. At eve he went to church and prayed for her, rejoicing that he had saved her from scandal, and hoping that she would not think he feared Guido's sword. All the next day he tried to study, but at eve he thought he was justified in going to give her comfort and counsel as a priest. He found her on the balcony, and she said, 'Why have you suffered me to wait here two days longer than is necessary, breaking my heart?'

He pleaded the risk to her life and reputation, but she answered that his danger was greater than hers, and that she saw his willingness to save her in his steadfast face. At last he answered, 'Lady, waste no thought or word, not even on forgiving me. To-morrow night, just before daybreak, leave this house, climb over its low, ruined wall, and pass through San Clemente, the only gate left unguarded at that hour, to the inn just beyond it. I shall be there.'

He satisfied himself that the way was practicable, engaged swift horses and a trusty driver, and provided himself with a secular dress and a sword. It was St.

George's day, April 23rd, when out in a glory of armour, like that warrior-saint, sprang the brave, young priest and bore away the lady in his arms, saving her for one splendid minute.

'Time's old barrier-growth of right and fit I felt,' he said, 'give way through all its tangles. Use and wont let me speed the special service, and I sped, until, at the dead of night, long before it was day, there I was at the goal, before the gate, with a low tune in my ears that would soon be loud, and in my eyes a faint light growing into a glare, ever new spiritual witnesses crowding the solitude. At last, in the distance, began a whiteness which waxed whiter and whiter, and grew nearer and nearer, until it was she. The white I saw was certainly her soul, for the body was one blackness from head to foot. She did not speak, but glided into the carriage as the moon enters a cloud.

'"To Rome, by San Spirito, as if the road were burning. Reach Rome, and I pay for run and risk to your heart's content!"

'This I said, and with one spring I was beside her, she and I alone. For the first hour we were both silent, and I thought that this was the way in which two martyrs, who had the blessing of dying side by side, lie awake, and wait in the same tomb for the signal that they are to rise together, before the last trumpet sounds. What I felt was not love,

but faith, the feeling that God lives and reigns. At times she drew a soft sigh, and then music seemed to hover just above her lips, but it did not break the silence, which was music too.

'In the morning light I found her head erect, her face turned full on mine, and her soul intent through her wide eyes. I answered them: "Thus far you are saved. We have passed Perugia, gone by it through the wood, I think. Opposite us, I know, is Assisi. This is holy ground."

'"How long is it since we left Arezzo?" she asked.

'And I answered, "Years—and some hours besides."

'When I left the carriage and got her wine and bread, she said, "Does my eating detain us?"

'"We must stay to change horses," I replied. "Therefore eat. We do not lose a moment. You can be sure that we reach Rome."

'Afterwards, as we were fording some stream below a great hill, she told me: "I have heard my mother say, that to have all pain suddenly leave a diseased limb was no good sign. It meant that the guardian angel ceased to pain the body, because all hope of cure was gone. All the pain has left my soul at once. All suffering must be sent to work out some good in the end. Perhaps I now feel the good for which my pain came. Otherwise I should fear."

'A long while later in the day she asked abruptly, "Have you a mother?"

'"She died as I was born."

'"A sister, then?"

'"No sister."

'"Who was it then—what woman were you wont to serve and be kind to, before I called you and you came?"

'This speech I did not like. Soon afterwards she bade me tell her if men were unhappy on account of their strength, as women were through their weakness. Later, as we passed a great gate, with figures of snakes and eagles on it, she asked me why I smiled. I told her that here was the villa of the bishop from whom I hoped for preferment once. At eve we heard the angelus bell, and she said, "I told you I can neither read nor write; my life stopped with my play-time. If I live again, I will learn. But you are a priest; why do you not read the service now? Read Gabriel's song, and the lesson, and then the little prayer to the Archangel Raphael, proper for us travellers."

'I did not like this either, but I read. When we stopped at Foligno it was dark, and people came out of the inn with lights. The driver said, "By this time to-morrow, if the saints help, horses continue good, and robbers do not hinder us, we reach Rome."

'I begged her: "Why tax your strength a second night? Alight and rest here. We are out of reach

of harm. Go and sleep, if only for an hour; I will keep watch in the doorway."

'Then her whole face changed; misery showed itself about her month, her eyes glistened like those of a tired fawn in the thicket that feels the hunter's probing spear, and she cried, in a voice like the fawns, "Oh, no stay! On to Rome! On, on! Unless you fear—which cannot be."

'All night long we did go on. Before dawn she grew restless, moaned, and talked to herself in her dreams. Once she waked and threatened something, and waved it away at arm's length, crying, "Never again with you! My soul is mine, and my body is my soul's! You and I are divided evermore in soul and body. Get you gone!"

'I felt that I had never prayed before in my life, but now I tried, saying, "Oh, if God who alone can help would do so! Am I His priest, with power to cast out devils? Let God arise, and all His enemies be scattered!"

'By morning there was peace, and no sigh out of her deep sleep. When she woke at last I answered to her first look, "Scarcely twelve hours more, and then Rome. Probably there was no pursuit; there can be no peril now. Keep brave. But twelve hours, and then no more of this terrible journey."

'"Oh, if it might only last my whole life!" she answered; "it is the interruption I dread. I should

not fear to be ever here, and thus, seeing no face and hearing no voice. Yours is not a voice; you speak when you are silent: nor a face; I see it in the dark. I want no faces or voices that change and grow unkind."

'That I liked; it was the best thing she said. When it grew broad day, I persuaded her to alight, and told a woman at the garden-gate, "It is my sister, married and unhappy; I am taking her home because her head is hurt. Talk to her apart, and comfort her, as you women know how to do."

'So I left them for a whole half-hour, and paced the road. When I came back and had the horses put to, I found her seated. Close to her knee a black-eyed child held a bowl of milk, and wondered to see how little she could drink, and in her arms lay the woman's infant. She smiled at me, and said, "How much good this has done me. This is a whole night's rest and more. I can go on now, though I wish to stay. How do you call that tree with the thick top, which holds the sun in its leafy green and gold, like a great egg of fire? Take away the babe, and let me go."

'In the carriage she said, "Still another day, my friend, and perhaps half the night, the woman says. I pray that the journey may finish, since it cannot last. There may be more misfortune at its close, and where will you be then? God suffice me!"

'Presently we passed a road-side shrine, and she asked me, "Say, candidly, not as a priest, but as a friend, if I were surprised and killed here on the spot, running away from my husband, do you consider that I should die in sin? I know that he tormented me only to entrap and despoil others. I would have let him do his pleasure if there had not been danger to people unborn. The woman said that a tree turns away with its nest from the north wind. Tell me, my friend, what have I done amiss?"

'I forget what I answered. I remember only that she might have said once more, "You are a priest;" but this time she said, "My friend."

'Day wore on, and the calm passed away. Her restless eyes began to wander again in new fear of the foe mine could not see; she talked wildly, and once she called me "Gaetano," which is not my name. My head seemed turning, too, and I hurried on the driver with threats and promises. Suddenly I saw the old tower, the little clump of white-walled huts, and the cypress-tree or two of Castelnuovo. Then I cried, "This is as good as Rome, for Rome is the next stage. You are saved, sweet lady!"

'She woke, saw the sky fierce with the red of the setting sun, and screamed out, "No! I must not die! Take me no further! I have more life than my own to save."

'Then she swooned. We seemed to be safe,

though there hovered over me a dark foreboding. Out of the coach into the inn I carried the pure and pale Pompilia, motionless and breathless, bore her through a pitying group, and laid her on a couch, where deep sleep cured her of all her woes at once. The host was urgent that I should let her stay until morning. Oh, my foreboding! But I could not choose. All night long I paced the passage keeping watch, and at the first hint of grey, I made up my mind it was morning, called for the horses, and gave gold to the sleepy grooms.

'I was going across the courtyard to break Pompilia's sleep, when Guido met me, howling and hissing insults. All that way he had followed us, hoping that we would alight and spend the night together, and now he exulted over his fancied success. He was armed to the teeth, but he kept his distance; and before I had time to do more than laugh at the absurdity of such an imp calling such a woman his wife, the officers he brought with him had seized me.

'"And now catch her," he yelled.

'"I will lead the way," I answered; "and you, ministers of justice, must notice whether her face shows any guilt as it meets my own."

'We went up together, and they broke in. There she lay, just as I left her the evening before, still motionless, sleep's very image, wax-like, seraphic,

flooded with the morning sun, which now filled the window with a light like blood.

'"Behold the poisoner, the adulteress, feigning sleep! Seize her, and bind her," hissed Guido.

'She sprang up erect, but he slunk back into the window and leant there, a blot against all light and life.

'"Away from me!" she screamed; "I am God's!"

'I tried to reach her, but my arms were held fast.

'"Ha! and my only friend, too, you outrage," shouted she; sprang on her husband, and snatched his sword from the scabbard. The sunrise played joyfully on the blade as she brandished it, and cried, "Die, devil, in God's name!"

'Alas! they all closed around her, twelve to one, and she lay disarmed. I told the officers, "My enemy and I are both aliens; my rank is higher than his. I am ready to meet him, sword to sword; but he prefers the law. Therefore I appeal to Rome; take us there."

'Then and thus, for the last time in this life, I saw Pompilia's face.'

Both were carried to Rome, tried there, and sentenced; he to three years of banishment at Civita, and she to confinement until reformation, in a convent for Magdalens, under the care of quiet nuns who sung away her ugly past. Little heed was paid by the judges to the gross and stupid love-

letters said to have been found at Castelnuovo, or to the stories of improper intimacy, told not only by the waiting-woman but by the driver. The latter's testimony to this effect could be procured only by rough treatment at Arezzo, where the Governor readily sentenced Pompilia, in her absence, to life-long imprisonment in the workhouse, and Guillichini, falsely charged with having aided her flight, to the galleys. Conti was poisoned.

To the lawsuit still going on between Pietro and Guido, were added two others, Pompilia and her husband each asking for a divorce. No decision had been made, when, after a few months in the convent, Pompilia became so unwell that she was placed under the care of Violante and Pietro in the little villa outside of the gate. And there, the day before Christmas, was born a son whom the young mother named Gaetano, after a new saint who would, she hoped, take better care of his namesake than the old saints had done of her. Thus the child was baptized two days after his birth, and then sent away to be nursed out of his father's reach, until his mother should become strong enough to take him where they might all dwell safely.

On New Year's day Pompilia makes her journey of state, from bed to board and back again, between Violante and Pietro. The next day the latter goes the round of the city churches—sight-seeing. At eve

he has returned, and is telling the women about the sheep and the angels he has seen, when there is a knock at the door, and a low, hoarse voice without says, 'Caponsacchi!' Violante opens with a smile, and in rushes Guido with four other murderers, whom he has hired and brought with him from Arezzo. The poor woman is struck down and her face mangled terribly. The good, old Pietro begs for time to confess and save his soul, but it is not granted. Pompilia rushes hither and thither, like a dove caught among lightnings. At last she, too, falls, under twenty-two wounds. Her husband lifts her by the long, dishevelled hair, holds her with one hand at arm's length, and tries with the other if he can feel any breath comes from the pale mouth. He looks his whole heart's hate on her shut eyes, and rejoices in the thought that now the money must go to his son, and thus be his.

The neighbours are coming, however, and he must fly. He has forgotten to take out a license to hire post-horses, and the official is not to be bribed or overawed, even by the Count's calling himself a duke, so the five have to make their way on foot through the mud towards the frontier. The rude peasant lads whom Guido has hired from among his own labourers are so provoked at his delaying to pay the price of blood, that they agree to rob and murder him before they separate. They have reeled along for twenty

miles, and almost reached Tuscany, when fatigue obliges them to take shelter in a hovel meant for beasts. There they are lying asleep, with their bloody weapons beside them, when the officers of justice seize them and carry them back to Rome.

Pompilia has revived and made manifest the truth, as she prayed the Virgin to let her live long enough to do. Day after day she lies in Saint Anna's Hospital, with a lamentable smile on her patient lips, and her flower-like body stabbed through and through. The judges listen to her evidence, priests absolve her soul, painters sketch eagerly what they call the loveliest face in Rome, and weeping listeners crowd around her bed as she tells her story. Part of this has been already quoted. After forgiving freely her husband, who may, she hopes, yet find grace, and saying all she can to excuse her foster-parents, she intrusts her little babe to the Heavenly Father, feeling sure that He will stoop to it all the more kindly, and have His own way with it all the more fully, because she must leave it to Him wholly. Finally, she says:—

'My last breath shall bear away my soul in being true! He is still here in his rightful place. Even now I find again the face and eyes of my one friend, and am ever with Caponsacchi. Oh! lover of my life! Oh! soldier-saint! no work once begun shall ever pause for death. Love will be more and more helpful

to me in the new path I must tread, and my weak hand rest in his strong one. Tell him that from his deed came no faint touch of harm, no hint of failure, but all happiness and good. But why explain? He sees all I do, and so much more! It was his name that I sprang to meet. He is ordained to call, and I to come. Not one flower of all his deeds and words has faded without dropping a seed which has grown a balsam-tree, whose blossoms perfume this place. He is a priest, and therefore he cannot marry; which is right. I think he would not marry if he could. Marriage on earth seems such a counterfeit. In heaven we have the real and sure one. There we shall be as the angels, who "neither marry, nor are given in marriage;" but from being apart know themselves into one, and at length are found married. Marriage-making for the earth! So let him wait during God's instant—which men call years,—and meantime hold fast by the truth and his own great soul. Only through such souls does God show enough of His light for us here in the dark to rise by. And I rise!'

Capcnsacchi has been summoned to Rome, and there, in a small, grim room, whose oak panels seem to have been rubbed black and shiny for ages with the sins of the Eternal City, he once more tells his story to the same judges who, six months before, smiled at it incredulously, but now weep with him, or

else cower before him, as he declares, that if they had then done justice to Pompilia, she—the glory of life, the beauty of the world, and the splendour of heaven —would not be at that moment bleeding away her breath. He points out that he would have had everything to lose by eloping with her, and nothing to gain, if they had previously been as intimate as Guido alleged. He insists that he has felt only an allowable and holy love of her, as embodying all that is good and true, and that the first glance at her, standing in the balcony and looking like the Lady of all the Sorrows, told him that there was no duty in the whole world so plain as that of being good and true himself, and leaving all appearances to the Lord of Shows and Prince of the Powers of the Air. He promises to do his duty as a priest and live contentedly, but he confesses that he keeps dreaming of an imaginary life, which might be led by a man unfettered by any vow in the company of such a woman: seeing her learn and learning by her, living above all that is dark and petty, beholding but one purpose and one will evolve themselves in the world and change all the wrong to right—thus having to do with nothing but the good, and true, and eternal, and learning of these, not merely in the main current of public life, but in the small experiences of every day, and the concerns of one particular hearth and home, not only in the comet's rush, but also in the rose's birth.

'Thus,' concludes he, 'I am like a drudging student, who trims his lamp, opens his Plutarch, draws closer his patched gown, and puts himself in the place of Greek or Roman, as he dreams how he, too, might fight, save, or rule the world, until at last he awakes with a contented smile to his accustomed and solitary nothingness. So I pass from such communion, content . . . . O great and merciful God! Miserable me!'

One half of Rome took sides with him and Pompilia fully, but the other supported Guido, and jealous husbands saw nothing but justice in her death and that of the poor old Comparini, whose mangled bodies were exposed, amid rows of tapers, to great crowds before the altar of San Lorenzo in Lucina, where the child had been baptized, and wedded, and was soon to be buried. In many a palace near by, some nobleman, who wished to be impartial, and who is called in the poem a *tertium quid*, stood up, with his laces and brocade full of musk, his peruke duly powdered, his solitaire diamond sparkling in his shirt-frill, and his cane hanging from his ruffled wrist, as he tried to measure out praise and blame in due proportion before fine ladies, who appeared to listen as he dilated on the improbability that Pompilia and Caponsacchi were altogether innocent, and Guido such an utter monster as he must, in that case, be.

Before the same judges who had already heard

the Canon sat the Count, his brow twitching, his lips wincing, and his shoulder out of joint. Still, Religion suffered man to pull bone from bone, and tear flesh in their joint behalf, while she looked on primly, without a whisper of disapproval. This state of things would, indeed, have lasted until doomsday, if the burly slave had not at last wiped his brow and muttered, 'This is vile and foolish work, and should have been denounced as sinful. I will make it so. At any rate, no more of it for me; and thus I break the tool of torture.'

Then Religion started up, stared, looked around for help, and, seeing none, said with a smile, 'What! is the rack broken? Well done! And did I forget to stop your using it? This was a mistake in both of us—the fault of this blind age. It must be denounced somewhere in my book. Henceforth we will find out truth by milder means.'

Ah! but if we had to wait for thee, Religion, to open the book, that serves for thee to sit on, and pick out such passages, we should wait indeed!

Guido is represented as blaming the torture of himself merely because he is ready enough to tell the truth without it, avowing that he killed Pompilia, Pietro, and Violante, but insisting that this was only the just punishment for their treachery. He pleads that he fulfilled his own part of the marriage covenant, but they broke their bargain from the first, as

especially did Pompilia, who was never willing to accept him as her husband. Her relations with her young priest were what might have been expected in her mother's child. He had been robbed by them, and all the household drugged before the flight. His only mistake, besides that of not punishing her severely for first noticing the gallant, was that of not slaying them both at Castelnuovo. His regard for the law made him wait then, in hope of legal redress. Tuscany would have punished the criminals fully. Rome, too, chastised them; but so slowly and slightly that he felt it his duty to bring his sword to her aid, and strike on God's side. Now he has a right to expect to be restored to liberty and his hereditary rank; and this he claims, not so much for his own sake as for that of his aged mother, of his priestly brothers—one, Paolo, a fugitive in exile; the other, Girolamo, cowering awestruck at home—and, finally, of his innocent little son. Thus shall the wholesome household rule come into force again, husbands be once more God's representatives, truth triumph, and justice be the victor in the world's battle.

Similar arguments in behalf of Guido and his four accomplices are presented in Latin by their advocate, the Procurator of the Poor, the jolly and learned Don Hyacinthus de Archangelis, who begins to write on the day when his son and namesake, spoken of by him under more than a dozen of endearing diminutives,

becomes eight years old—an event about to be celebrated by a family feast, the anticipation of which curiously agitates the mind of the fond father. Thus, after telling stories of beasts who punish unchastity, he exclaims, 'Shall man, creation's master-stroke and intellectual glory, show himself less sensitive to dishonour, and so be the blot of the earth he crawls on, to disgrace?—come, that's solid and poetic, too!—man degenerate into living only for low tastes and mean creeping cares about the animal life?—I hope my cook has not forgotten that nothing stings fried liver out of its monotony of richness like fennel-root chopped fine with parsley-sprigs. I said parsley; ought I to have spoken of fennel, too? No, she must have chopped it.—And so we mount from beast to man.'

With his supper never out of his thoughts he goes on, quoting the Bible to show how unwilling Jesus was to give his honour to another, or Paul to have his glorying made void, and urging that nothing showed more clearly that Guido thought like them than did his forgetting to pay the hirelings their fee. What could he now expect but pardon from the city which had given birth to Virginius and Lucretia!

On the other hand, the Prosecutor, Bottinius, a bachelor, so fond of his own eloquence that he much regrets being restricted to handing in a printed brief, urges that whatever Pompilia may reasonably be sup-

posed to have done, Guido certainly did what deserves death. He portrays her, however, as a faultless spirit in a faultless form, a crown of jewels on the forehead of humanity; in her infancy pellucid as the pearl, in her childhood the sapphire—said to have been once a dewdrop and to have sucked blueness from the sky; and so eclipsing both these gems in her womanhood as to be like the opal, whose milk-white pallor of chastity love suffuses here and there with a hint and tint of flame. Then, in showing how Caponsacchi really helped her, while other people at best merely dreamt of doing so, he tells this Jewish legend:—

'Three men, the greatest, best, and worst of all—Peter, John, and Judas—after travelling all day, probably to put down some heresy, arrived at nightfall, hungry and footsore, at a lonely farmhouse, where they could get no food but a wretched starveling of a fowl, which would barely make one of them a supper. Peter proposed that while it was cooking all three should go to sleep, and he who should dream the happiest dream receive the roast chicken as his rightful reward. All three, accordingly, lay down in the same room on separate beds of straw. Each dreamt his dream, and all waked together. Then John said, "I dreamt that I had gained what we all wish for, the proud title, throughout the earth and to the end of time, of the Beloved Disciple. Mine the meal!" "But I," said Simon Peter, "dreamed that I

received the leadership of our company, and became the Master's viceroy, with the keys of heaven and hell, and dominion over all the earth. Mine the meal!" Then the Iscariot, who had been quietly smacking his lips, heaved a deep sigh, and whined out, "And I have had such a wretched dream as proves that I am the meanest of all the band. I dreamed that I did not go to sleep, but, as soon as I knew that you had done so, I slipped noiselessly out of bed and down stairs, found the fowl done to a turn, said no grace, but fell to, and left only the bare skeleton. In penitence for so lamentable a dream, I renounce all share in the real food. The imaginary meal is enough for me. But take care that whatever you leave is given to the poor."

'The other two scuttled downstairs at once, and found only the savour, the drumstick bones, and what was thenceforth called the merry-thought, in memory of the idea that better than any dream is keeping wide-awake.'

From these lawyers and their two assistants, eight printed briefs were laid successively before the same judges who had heard Caponsacchi and Guido. They found the Count and the four peasants guilty, and sentenced all the five to death. Exemption from punishment was then claimed by Guido, on the ground that he had taken several of the minor orders in the Church. Thus the whole case came before

the Pope, to whom were presented petitions for mercy from all the nobility of Rome, and also from the Emperor's ambassador. The common people, however, were permitted by the Holy Father to ask him, as he walked among them, whether he meant to reserve murder as a privilege for men of rank.

Innocent XII. was then eighty-six, and had distinguished himself by checking the persecution of the Jansenists, a Calvinistic party in the Church, who are called, throughout the poem, by the nickname of Molinists, by forbidding lotteries, by turning the Lateran Palace into an orphan asylum, and by abolishing nepotism, so that men were wont to say that his only nephews were the lame and blind, while his own food cost no more than any poor priest's.

Let us look at him as, after spending a chill, rainy February day over these most dismal of documents, which drew down night on him before evening, and brought into his soul a colder winter than that upon the earth, he sits, with naught of Peter's treasury but a stool, a table, and a crucifix of lath, to furnish the plain closet where he works. After long musing, he opens a huge old tome in primitive type, and reads about his predecessors, as is his daily custom. This time it is the story of Pope Stephen, who, eight hundred years before, sat in judgment on the dead body of Pope Formosus, and had it mutilated

and cast into the Tiber; a deed which was condemned by three of the later pontiffs, though a fourth justified it, while the Church continued to accept Formosus as a holy man, despite his final condemnation.

'I, too, may err,' says Innocent, rightly named so; 'but I am sure that I shall not sin if I use my powers faithfully and decide accordingly. I judge that Guido's noble birth, solid intellect, priestly training, and high culture, make him all the more guilty, in that he married when not urged by one permissible impulse, either the mere liking of eye and ear, or the true longing of the heart that loves, but led only by greed for gold, to gain which he drove away Pietro and Violante from their child by sheer cruelty, and then went on trying to goad her into ruin of both body and soul. This hellish plot I see foiled by the all-merciful God's giving to Pompilia and Caponsacchi, not only a purity of soul that would not take pollution, but, what was least to be expected in either priest or woman, such a courage, as made the Count, though armed to the chattering teeth, cower before the Canon's steadfast eye and quiet word, while out of that poor, trampled worm, the wife, sprang a fiery serpent. The birth of a son leads all other men to thank God, but Guido only to murder in cold blood. This wolf I have still to sentence; but the brother-brute, that fox-faced, horrible priest, Paolo, has fled from punishment for

the crime he counselled. Out of reach, too, are Girolamo and his unwomanly mother, but not those four stout, bright-eyed boys, whose rustic simplicity and uncorrupted youth did not prevent their being ready to murder anyone for petty gain, even their own lord. They shall have their due; and so shall the Archbishop, that hireling who fled before the wolf.

'First among the victims is Pompilia, whom I pronounce perfect in whiteness. Stoop down, my child, and give one happy moment to the poor old Pope, heart-sick at having to blame all his world. Everywhere I see intellect, energy, and knowledge; but these do not form such a marvel as thy soul, the flower which earth holds up to the softened gaze of God. It was not given to Pompilia to know much, to write a book, or to rule mankind; but if there be any virtue in purity and patience, in faith held fast despite the fiend, in right returned for wrong, and in fullest pardon given for worst injury, if there be any praise for all this, then will this child prove just the one prize granted to unworthy me, who have been for ten years a gardener of the ungrateful soil.

'All day long I manure my garden with sweat and blood, but at eve it still lies barren, when from the briars around it comes one blossom to make me proud. The plants which have flourished under my own eye yield only timid leaves and uncertain buds,

but this chance-sown, cleft-nursed seed, that has sprung up by the wayside under the enemy's foot, breaks into a blaze, and spreads itself as one wide glory of desire for the sun it loves. My flower, my rose, which I gather for God's breast, this most I praise in thee, that, after having been obedient to the end, dutiful to the foolish parents, and submissive to the bad husband, thou couldst rise from the old law to a new one, promoted by one peal of God's trumpet to a new service; called thenceforth to bear no longer, but to fight, and be found sublime in thy new impatience with the foe, treading the man into the hell meet for him, and so obeying God all the more. Thus didst thou accept the obligation laid upon thee, mother elect, to save thy unborn child. Go on past me, have thy reward, and be not far for me to seek, when I follow thee, if so I may!

'And not so very much behind her I place my warrior-priest, in whom I gain another rose, the golden one with which we popes greet monarchs. His boyishness and worldliness up to the time he met her I must blame. Even when my athlete listened to the martyr's first moan, and, on the instant, made one great leap into the middle of the arena, there was rash unstripping and breach of decorum, the penalty for which I nowise dare relax. Men do not see the star within the cloud; but for that brave, starry berth, God be thanked. I find it

easy to believe that through all your warfare you were pure in deed and thought, though the perfect beauty of the body and soul which you were saving for God's sake was revealed so plainly, that there may, perchance, have been sore temptation.

'Once more, God be thanked! Why comes temptation but for man to master it, and make it crouch beneath his feet, as the pedestal for him to mount in triumph? We pray, "Lead us not into temptation." But, O, Thou! who makest the bold Thy servants, do Thou lead up temptations, like reluctant dragons, to him who dares to fight, that so he may do battle and have praise. And praise to you, my champion, for this above all, because it was when my men-at-arms, sworn to God's service, and having pay, and privileges, and crosses on their coats, were found too stiff through standing long in rank, and too deaf after hearing many orders, that you, in your mask and motley, not pledged to fight but only to dance, sprang forth, the hero. Well done! By breaking boundaries you have let light into the world. See it on your path, go to work once more, be unhappy; but have life, my son! Learn the use of discipline, and march on, loyal to the end!

'And you, father and mother, as you truly were, the gracious eye may find you. You kept sliding unawares into silly crime, and stumbling back into stupid virtue, soaring high in love, and sinking low in

self-indulgence, vanity, and craft. Swift and woful death has taught you what awaits the inconsistent. You have been punished in what was purest, your love for your child, since that was best worth purging. Black cannot be neutralized by white, nor the good in man compensate for the bad, life's business being simply the terrible choice between them.

'So I judge according to the light that is given me; and I do not fear Him who gave it, and by whom I shall be judged. We need such instances of love without limit in self-sacrifice, as this tale gives us, to show Him in His completeness. I can believe all this dread machinery of sin and sorrow devised to evolve the moral qualities of man, make him love and be beloved, and thus eventually become God-like, wringing out all pleasure from all pain, for our common heritage to all eternity.

'I do not wonder that men leave the pearl of great price unnoticed on the sand; but this does overwhelm me with surprise and fear, that the favoured few, who have found that pearl and named it, should turn away from it to dredge for mud-worms. There is the Archbishop, whom I armed and decked as champion of the faith and set upon a pinnacle. Pompilia cries, "Deliver me from the fiend!"

'"No," he says, "thy Guido is strong and dangerous. He needs some bone to gnaw in his

den. So the fawn that limps up bleeding to my feet—come to me, daughter—I throw him back thus!"

'Have we over-armed our knight, or given him gold and silk instead of plain steel—made an archbishop and undone a saint? Here is the barefoot monk, who long ago stamped out all worldly sparks with fasting, watching, and the wire scourge. At the first cold sprinkle of danger on his brawny back he shudders, dares not touch the ark which his betters are willing to have fall, breaks his promise, and lets her break her heart. Individuals are weak; let us bind them together into institutions and so get strength. Here is that Magdalene monastery, meant to help women, because these helped Christ. Pompilia is sent to them; they do help her and testify heartily to her pure life and saintly death. They find out that she has wealth, and then they say, "Since our convent has a right to the goods of all women under its charge who have lived impurely, and since Pompilia's trial proves that she did this, we therefore take possession of the property she leaves behind her."

'It is as if the Apostles, after the Master's death, had claimed the seamless robe, and charged him with having taken the money for it out of the common bag.

'Euripides might tell me that, though he lived long before Christ's birth, and under conditions which have made his salvation impossible, he yet adopted

virtue as his rule of life, waived all reward, loved for loving's sake, taught the world what his own heart taught him, and has been teaching it these two thousand years. Witness his plays! He might ask me if he who found his way so far on all fours is to be punished for not seeing the sun at midnight, and those rewarded who have missed the plain road in the blaze of noon. I can only trust that if there comes a new age of strife with doubt, it will shake the torpor of assurance from our creed.

'At all events I stand on the stage still, though ready for my exit, and my last act is due to Him who armed me not only with Peter's keys, but with Paul's sword. I smite once more, and with all my might, though my friends and nobles would stay my arm. I write thus to the Governor :—

'"Tell Count Guido and his four fellows that they die to-morrow. Set up the scaffold with all diligence, but not in the customary place. Since he is of noble birth, let him be beheaded in the Piazza del Popolo, where his peers resort, and let his companions be hanged on either side. Till this is done let there be incessant prayer for all the five."

'I have no hope for the main criminal, except that such a sudden fate may strike out one flash of truth for him by which he shall be saved. Enough, for I may die this very night, and how should I dare to die and let this man live?'

And next we hear Guido screaming and foaming like a wild cat in a trap, while beside him, in his fetid cell, near the Castle of St. Angelo, crouch two awe-struck figures, a Cardinal and an Abbot, both Tuscan friends, and one of them formerly his patron. They are doing their best to bring him to confession and absolution, and outside sweeps together, like a flock of crows, and slowly settles down in silence, the frightful Brotherhood of Death, with their black cowls and frocks, black rosaries dangling at each waist, torches lighted, cross-bones banner spread, and gigantic crucifix planted in the midst. They wait only for a sign that the murderer's soul is safe, and then they will lead him to his doom.

Fiercely he curses his judges, his lawyers, and his victims. Bitterly he scoffs at all talk of confessing his sins. He has lived, like all the rest of the world, trying to get all the pleasure he could without being caught by the laws, though at last he blundered into the trap. The two priests have sought only such pleasures as he did, and never done a single action to show that they cared for anything else. It is merely for worldly advantages that people feign faith, and not one saintly act is done in Rome which might not have been prompted by the devil. What an explosion real belief in Christianity would make! At present one of the Pope's guards who should break in upon his Holiness to talk about danger to his soul would be

scourged, but he would be rewarded for rushing in to say that he had found a powder-barrel with a lighted match. We interrupt a friend's supper to tell him of a plague-spot on his cheek, but we dare not tell him of one in his soul. What the Book calls gold we turn away from, and what it calls dross we prize. For one monk or nun, who really clutches such gold and spurns such dross, there are fifty maniacs in the asylums. To God Himself he would say, 'If I am all one mistake, whose fault is it? Not mine at least, for I did not make myself!' Pompilia he calls at best a vapid nullity, whom he hates all the more because she forgave him; for he would not flee from hell to heaven if such a flight enabled his enemy to raise the head he held under his own foot on the fiery pavement. He burns to claim Lucrezia Borgia in hell as his bride, and teach her sins, in face of which she still is virtuous. At last he says, 'I have lived and died like a man, honest and bold, and I may take my chance. Right will be done to such men! But who are these people you have let descend my stair? Ha, their accursed psalm! Lights at the sill! Dare they bid you open? Treachery! Sirs, I have not yet spoken one word out of all the world of words I had to say. I have only laughed and mocked. It was all folly. My first true word is — Save me notwithstanding! Life is all! I was stark mad. Load the madman with chains and let him live! Don't open!

Keep me from them! I am yours — the Grand Duke's — no, the Pope's! Abate! Cardinal! Christ! Mary! God! . . . . Pompilia, will you let them murder me?'

The priests called this a confession, and Guido, after riding intrepidly through the streets, in the same disguise in which he did the murder, and, as was declared by a beggar, healing him of lameness by his prayers, mounted the scaffold, where his accomplices were already dangling, harangued the multitude, and laid his head on the block, with the name of Jesus on his lips. It was sunset on the twenty-second of February, 1698.

Innocent XII. lived long enough to protect the little Gaetano from the attack on his inheritance made by the rapacious nuns, whose lawyer was the same Bottinius who had succeeded in vindicating Pompilia's purity, and now failed utterly in trying to defame her. Thus the State and Church which had suffered her to be wronged so cruelly did her justice at last.

PIPPA PASSES.

IT is New Year's Day at Asolo, a little town near Treviso and Possagno, at the foot of the Venetian Alps; and Felippa, or, as she is commonly called, Pippa, a poor little orphan who winds silk in the mill, and has only this one holiday in all the year, springs out of bed as she sees the pure gold of dawn boiling over the night's cloudy brim. She does not mean to lose a single moment of this her only day. She feels how much more she needs to have it all sunshine than do those people in Asolo who are called the happiest. There is her employer's wife, that superb, haughty Ottima; no rain will keep her lover from spending the morning with her in her greenhouse. And there is Jules, the French sculptor, who is to be married that very noon, and will not let any cloud which may then veil the sky darken the sunshine in his heart and his bride's. Nor will a misty evening prevent young Luigi and his mother from sitting together, calmer than lovers but more fond than friends. And even the fiercest storm will not trouble the peace of the good old Bishop, who is to arrive that night to say masses for the soul of his brother,

a nobleman of Asolo, lately deceased. But one such disaster would darken all the year for poor little Pippa.

As she dresses, she wonders how she would like to be Ottima, with her Sebald to make love to her, while the husband sleeps and all the town gossips. No, there must be better love than that. She would rather be that dainty little blossom of a bride, whom Jules should not touch carelessly. But no, Pippa does not wish to be fettered even thus, and she fears that such a love might not last all her life. Much better would be a mother's love like Luigi's. Alas! that she has never felt her father or mother love her. Best of all, though, must be God's love! If she could change places with anyone, it would be with that holy and beloved Bishop; but she need not do that to have the love of God. Her New Year's hymn says:—

'All service ranks the same with God:
If now, as formerly He trod
Paradise, His presence fills
Our earth, each only as God wills
Can work—God's puppets, best and worst,
Are we; there is no last nor first.

'Say not "a small event!" Why "small?"
Costs it more pain than this, ye call
A "great event," should come to pass
Than that? Untwine me from the mass
Of deeds which make up life, one deed
Power shall fall short in or exceed.' *

* *Works*, 1868, p. 228, v. ii.

As she sings this, she determines that, on this day, she will pass by all these people, and see their happiness without envying it. Why should she be envious? since she may make herself as useful to men and dear to God as they are.

During the night, Ottima and her lover had murdered her husband; early in the morning the guilty pair are drinking wine together in the greenhouse on the hill. Sebald is tortured with remorse for having murdered a man who had saved him from starving; but Ottima shows only an exultation, in which she tries to make her lover join, by reminding him of the garden's silence in which she owned her love, and of their wild, stormy nights together in the woods. At last she persuades him to call her his great white queen, and spirit's arbitress, magnificent in sin. But just as he is repeating these words after her, he hears Pippa singing :—

> 'The year's at the spring,
> And day's at the morn;
> Morning's at seven,
> The hill-side's dew-pearled;
> The lark's on the wing;
> The snail's on the thorn;
> God's in His heaven—
> All's right with the world.' *

Her innocent voice awakened Sebald's conscience, which Ottima has scarcely lulled to rest. Now he

* *Selections*, 1872, p. 60.

realises all that he has done, and feels how far superior purity is to lust; the guilty woman at once becomes empty of all the charms which fascinated him. He reproaches and curses her bitterly, and is about to commit suicide, when she begs him to kill her first. So they die together, her last words being, 'Oh, have mercy, not on me, but on him, O God!'

That noon finds half-a-dozen art-students from Venice concealed in the pomegranate-clump, and other hiding-places, before the house of Jules, the sculptor, and waiting to see him return with his bride, whom he has married at Possagno, Canova's birthplace, in the church which was designed by the great artist and contains his tomb. These young men have been tempted, by their jealousy of the superiority of Jules, not only in art but in morals, to forge a series of letters to him in the name of Phene, a Greek girl of fourteen whom they knew at Venice, where she could be hired as a model by the hour. Jules was so struck with her apparent knowledge of art and approval of his works, as well as by the incidental descriptions of her pale, quiet face, and magnificent hair and eyes, as to propose marriage at once; and to this the wretches finally agreed in her name, on condition that the first meeting should be before the altar, in accordance with the Continental ideas of the decorum to be observed towards a lady whose family was said to oppose the match. They

have had her dressed as a lady and brought to Possagno; and now they are waiting to laugh over her husband, and prevent him from ill-treating her. They have no fear that he will lose the bloom of his youth.

'Nothing worth keeping is ever lost in this world: look at a blossom—it drops presently, having done its service and lasted its time; but fruits succeed, and where would be the blossom's place could it continue? . . . . Keep but ever looking, whether with the body's eye or the mind's, and you will soon find something to look on! Has a man done wondering at women?—there follow men, dead and alive, to wonder at. Has he done wondering at men?—there's God to wonder at.'

In due time Jules leads Phene into his studio, and places her beside him on its single seat; he is so happy, that his only fear is lest sudden death snatch her from him. He wonders how he can go on carving out his fancies with her, his living truth, before him. He shows her the letters which he keeps hidden in the bosom of his Psyche, then his Greek books, and then the statues mentioned so often in the correspondence. Among them he points out her own figure, a Hippolyta, sitting on her Numidian horse. She gazes in blank astonishment on everything, even on a bas-relief which he says that he has made ready for her coming by her own minute directions, which bade him represent an Athenian

praising the slayers of Hipparchus the tyrant, and standing up at a banquet, amid a cluster of hands and arms, which hold aloft their myrtle-boughs dripping with wine, and thus form a frame around the singer's enraptured face. Phene still keeps silence, though he goes on talking to her about the various advantages for his work of chalk, marble, bronze, and steel, all which have helped his art to give birth to the better nature everywhere concealed, and bring to light the highest type for which he has always sought, namely, human beauty, to which all other lovely things lead the artist, just as the peach suggests some Dryad's rosy shape.

All Phene understands is that his voice has lifted her up so high above the world, that the past of sorrow, suffering, and shame, is beginning to drop away from her. She dares not speak, lest she should break the spell and fall back into poverty and sin; she can only murmur, 'I love—love you.' At last she remembers that Natalia, the wretched woman she lived with, has forced her to learn by heart, and promise to repeat to Jules some puzzling rhymes, which are said to be written by his friends and meant for his good. She tries to recall them, but at first can only utter words which have impressed her more deeply, such as, 'Do not die, love! I am yours.' At last she begins with:—

> 'I am a painter who cannot paint;
> In my life, a devil rather than saint,

In my brain, as poor a creature too:
No end to all I cannot do!
Yet do one thing at least I can—
Love a man or hate a man
Supremely: thus my lore began.
Through the Valley of Love I went,
In the lovingest spot to abide,
And just on the verge where I pitched my tent,
I found Hate dwelling beside.
(Let the Bridegroom ask what the painter meant,
Of his Bride, of the peerless Bride!)
And, further, I traversed Hate's grove,
In its hatefullest nook to dwell;
But lo, where I flung myself prone, couched Love
Where shadow threefold fell.
(The meaning—those black bride's eyes above,
Not a painter's lip should tell!)

* * * * *

'So I grew wise in Love and Hate,
From simple, that I was of late.
For . . . . now I am wiser, know better the fashion
How passion seeks aid from its opposite passion:
And if I see cause to love more, hate more
Than ever man loved, ever hated before . . . .
I find them the very warders
Each of the other's borders.
When I love most, Love is disguised
In Hate; and when Hate is surprized
In Love, then I hate most; ask
How Love smiles through Hate's iron casque,
Hate grins through Love's rose-braided mask,—
And how, having hated thee,
I sought long and painfully

To reach thy heart, nor prick
The skin, but pierce to the quick—
Ask this, my Jules, and be answered straight
By thy bride—how the painter Lutwyche can hate!'*

Jules starts up at hearing this name, which, with the shouts of mocking laughter from without, tell him how cruelly he has been duped. His first thought is of deadly vengeance. He stops only to give poor little Phene all the gold he has saved up for two years of travel, and to bid her sell all his casts, statues, books, and medals, and do her best to keep out of Natalia's clutches. He is about to leave her, when he hears Pippa pass under his windows, singing:—

'Give her but a least excuse to love me!
When—where—
How—can this arm establish her above me,
If fortune fixed her as my lady there,
There already, to eternally reprove me?
("Hist"—said Kate the queen;
But "Oh"—cried the maiden, binding her tresses,
"'Tis only a page that carols unseen
Crumbling your hounds their messes!")

'Is she wronged?—To the rescue of her honour,
My heart!
Is she poor?—What costs it to become a donour?
Merely an earth to cleave, a sea to part.
But that fortune should have thrust all this upon her!
("Nay, list,"—bade Kate the queen;

* *Works*, 1868, pp. 253-4.

And still cried the maiden, binding her tresses,
"'Tis only a page that carols unseen
Fitting your hawks their jesses!")' *

This ballad about Catherine Cornaro, who had dwelt near Asolo, after resigning the crown of Cyprus to the Venetian Republic, reminds Jules that one lover is usually the monarch and the other the servant, and here he may be monarch. Before him trembles this newly-created woman, with her soul but just alighted on her lips, and waiting his word to say whether it must depart, or may enter in and keep her living. It is an art to call form out of clay and marble; is it not a far higher one to call soul out of form? Why should he trouble himself to slay a wretched dauber, whom men will yet hoot to death? So he tells his bride they will leave for Greece that very night, and make their home in some island amid the sea's silence. Then he breaks up his casts and models, to begin art afresh. He has never had an ideal of his own before, and so he has hitherto been merely working out other people's conceptions; his only chance of becoming original is to enter a new field, and try to be a painter. One may do whatever he likes in art, if he is only sure that he does like it.

Meantime, the author of Phene's rhymes, an

* *Selections*, 1872, p. 5.

English vagabond named Bluphocks, is loitering near Luigi's house with some policemen, who have brought him a pocketful of silver from the Bishop's steward, who has designs against Pippa. They are shocked at Bluphocks appearing to think that the money comes from the Bishop, but he keeps rattling on thus:—

> 'Oh, were but every worm a maggot,
> Every fly a grig,
> Every bough a Christmas faggot,
> Every tune a jig;

'In fact, I have abjured all religions; but the last I inclined to was the Armenian, for I have travelled —do you see?—and at Prussia Improper (so styled because the sun is so bleak and hungry there) you might remark over a venerable house-porch a certain Chaldaic inscription, and, brief as it is, a mere glance at it used absolutely to change the mood of every bearded passenger. In they all turned, one and all, the young and lightsome with no irreverent pause, the aged and decrepit with a sensible alacrity; 'twas the Grand Rabbi's abode, in short. Struck with curiosity, I lost no time in learning Syriac—these are vowels, you dogs,—follow my stick's end in the mud,' adds he, repeating some logical terms, '"Celarent, Darii, Ferio!"

'One morning I presented myself spelling-book in hand—*a*, *b*, *c*—I picked it out letter by letter, and

what was the purport of this miraculous posy? Some cherished legend of the past, you'll say:—

"How Moses hocus-pocussed
Egypt's land with fly and locust:"

'Or— "How to Jonah sounded harshesh,
Get thee up and go to Tarshish:"

'Or— "How the angel meeting Balaam,
Straight his ass returned a salaam.'

'In no wise, "Shackabrach—Boach—somebody or other—Isaach, Re-cei-ver, Pur-cha-ser, and Ex-changer of—Stolen Goods!" So, talk to me of the religion of a bishop! I have renounced all bishops save Bishop Beveridge—mean to live so—and die—

'As some Greek dog-sage, dead and merry,
Hell-ward bound in Charon's wherry,
With food for both worlds, under and upper,
Lupine-seed and Hecate's supper,
And never an obolus ——'

'(Though, thanks to you, or your steward, or his Bishop, my pocket is full of burning zwanzigers)—

'To pay the Stygian ferry!'

'See that you deserve them, then,' says the policeman. 'There is the girl for you, passing yonder.'

'Can you not tell me more about her?' urges the Englishman. 'Something might be made out of her name. Pippa—short for Felippa—rhymes to

'Believest thou, King Agrippa?'

'Put it into rhyme that your head and a ripe musk-melon would not be dear at half a zwanziger. Go, and tell us when Signor Luigi enters his turret, and then after your Pippa.'

He leaves them, and then one points out that not a shutter of Ottima's house has been opened all day, but the others reply that they never molest people who mean well with the government, and proceed to talk about their instructions, which are to the effect that, if Luigi does not himself use the passport he has already procured for Vienna, and leave Asolo that night, they are to conclude that the pass is meant for some one else, and arrest him at once as one of the Carbonari, the sworn enemies of the Emperor. By this time Luigi and his mother are sitting in the ruined turret, where he wakes the echoes by shouting out the name of Brutus and 'Meet your fate!' He is dreaming of assassinating the Emperor, Francis I., and is all ready to depart. His mother keeps entreating him to stay with her however, and he is undecided. Of the doom which will fall upon him if he lingers he knows nothing. The mother in vain reminds him how old and stupid the Emperor is, and how little hope he can have of an escape. He answers:—

'Escaping would spoil all! I have had my full share of life's joys, been seated at the head of the table, and helped first on purpose to have me rise

soon and give place to others. I can carry to my departed brothers good news of this world's splendours, its rainbows and moonbeams, and the crimson waves in which the sun drifts away.'

'Such patriotism as yours would be an easy virtue for a selfish man,' urges his mother. 'You are like people who are so short-sighted that they can see nothing between them and the sun. You overlook all the duties you have been so faithful to. But I am willing you should go, if you will tell me your reason for hating the Emperor.'

Luigi tries to do so, but fails to make himself intelligible, and can only say, 'There are plenty of people who can prove to you that Italy is wronged. My boast is that they have made me feel it, though I cannot tell you why.'

As a last resort she reminds him how their young friend, Chiara, is coming to visit them next June, with her blue eyes upturned as if life were one long and sweet surprise. Luigi begins to talk about the expedition they had planned to see Titian's Annunciation at Treviso. The journey to Vienna is almost given up, and the time for the arrest drawing near, when Pippa passes under the turret, singing:—

> 'A king lived long ago,
> In the morning of the world,
> When earth was nigher heaven than now:
> And the king's locks curled,

Disparting o'er a forehead full
As the milk-white space 'twixt horn and horn
Of some sacrificial bull—
Only calm as a babe new-born :
For he was got to a sleepy mood,
So safe from all decrepitude,
Age with its bane, so sure gone by,
(The gods so loved him while he dreamed),
That, having lived thus long, there seemed
No need the king should ever die.'

'No need that such a king should ever die!' exclaims Luigi.

'Among the rocks his city was.
Before his palace, in the sun,
He sat to see his people pass,
And judge them every one
From its threshold of smooth stone.
They haled him many a valley-thief
Caught in the sheep-pens,—robber-chief,
Swarthy and shameless—beggar-cheat—
Spy-prowler—or rough pirate found
On the sea-sand left aground;
And sometimes clung about his feet,
With bleeding lip and burning cheek,
A woman, bitterest wrong to speak
Of one with sullen, thickset brows:
And sometimes from the prison-house
The angry priests a pale wretch brought,
Who through some chink had pushed and pressed,
On knees and elbows, belly and breast,
Worm-like into the temple—caught
He was by the very god,
Who ever in the darkness strode

Backward and forward, keeping watch
O'er his brazen bowls, such rogues to catch!
These, all and every one,
The king judged, sitting in the sun.'

'That king should still judge, sitting in the sun!' repeats the listener.

'His councillors, on left and right,
Looked anxious up,—but no surprise
Disturbed the king's old smiling eyes,
Where the very blue had turned to white.
'Tis said, a Python scared one day
The breathless city, till he came,
With forky tongue and eyes on flame,
Where the old king sat to judge alway;
But when he saw the sweepy hair,
Girt with a crown of berries rare,
Which the god will hardly give to wear
To the maiden who singeth, dancing bare
In the altar-smoke by the pine-torch lights,
At his wondrous forest rites,—
Seeing this, he did not dare
Approach that threshold in the sun,
Assault the old king smiling there.
Such grace had kings when the world begun!'*

Pippa passes on, but Luigi springs up, saying: 'Do kings have such grace now, as the world ends? The Python is in the city, on the throne, and brave men, whom God would crown for slaying him, are lurking in corners and fearing lest they become his

* *Works*, 1868, v. ii. pp. 268–70.

prey. There is a crown for me to win! It is weakness that made me hesitate. God's voice is calling me, and how can I stay? Farewell!'

That night Pippa sees him leave Asolo, with the disappointed bloodhounds growling after him. Before this, however, she has gone to the palace of the Bishop's late brother. On the steps sit some poor girls, one of whom is lamenting her lost home, miles away in the fields among the cherry orchards. As Pippa draws near, another of them sings a song which had been made by one of her lovers:—

'You'll love me yet!—and I can tarry
Your love's protracted growing:
June reared the bunch of flowers you carry
From seeds of April's sowing.

'I plant a heartfull now: some seed
At least, is sure to strike—
And yield—what you'll not pluck indeed,
Not love, but, maybe, like.

'You'll look, at least, on love's remains,
A grave's one violet:
Your look?—that pays a thousand pains.
What's death?—You'll love me yet!'*

This song attracts Pippa, and the girls call her to them and begin to tell how a rich and handsome Englishman has fallen violently in love with her, as he saw her working in the silk-mill.

Meantime the Bishop is questioning the steward

* *Ibid.* p. 274.

about the large sums of money which have been paid, and the villas and farms which have been given to the latter by the brother just deceased. The steward replies, that the family history will not bear investigating so closely; and when asked if he was ever freed from the interdict imposed on him for robbing a church, remarks that it was about that time he murdered his employer's friend Pasquale for him.

'I know well enough, Maffeo, for that is your real name,' answers the Bishop, 'what my two brothers were, and my poor father, too. Rest his soul! I have a chapel to support in order that it may rest. But I have not been a partaker in their sins. Nay, I mean to undo some of the wrong they have done. As far as my own pleasure is concerned, I should be glad to wear sackcloth, sleep on straw, and live on millet-cake. But on that account shall I let you, the off-scouring of the earth, flourish in such pomp as will be sure to mislead the poor and ignorant into thinking that it lessens the guilt which bought it? Am I to suffer you, a thief and a murderer, to keep these villas and farms, and live on them to beget other thieves and murderers? No, indeed—if this cough would only let me speak. I have whole centuries of my family's sins to redeem, and only a month or two of life for doing it. How shall I dare to say——?'

'"Forgive us our transgressions as we forgive—"' suggests Maffeo, but the Bishop checks him with—

'My friend, it is precisely because I confess myself to be a mere worm, sinful beyond measure, that I refuse to do what you would approve of. Shall I go on pardoning? I, who have no reason to suppose that anything less than my most earnest efforts will keep me out of mortal sin myself, much less let me help out others? No, I do trespass, but I will not double that by allowing you to trespass.'

'And suppose that those villas and estates were not your late brother's to give me, and are not yours to take from me? Do not be too hasty,' urges Maffeo.

'Precisely,' is the reply. 'Here is a letter I have just received, in which the Pope informs me that you are believed to have murdered the daughter of my elder brother, who would have been his heir. The Pontiff urges me to take all pains to bring you to justice, and recover all that infant's inheritance to the Church. While you are gnawing your fingers, Maffeo, the police are sealing up your papers, and I have only to raise my voice in order to bring in my servants from the next room to take care of you. You had better confess everything, and not make me raise my voice. Of course, it is the old story. The wicked uncle makes himself heir to his deceased brother by having the child, who is the rightful heir, murdered; and such ruffians as you, Maffeo, become his tools. Come, did you stab my niece, or throttle her, fourteen years ago?'

'Tell so old a story, and tell it no better!' sneers Maffeo. 'When did such a tool ever work as the wicked uncle wished? The child always smiles in the ruffian's face; or rather, he is not fool enough to put himself in the uncle's power so completely. He lets the little girl live, and keeps her under a false name, ready to be brought forward whenever he finds it for his interest.'

Here the Bishop strikes Maffeo and gives him the lie, but he says coolly, 'Ah! so a father might chastise his son. I shall sleep soundly to-night at least. What a life I have led! I did not dare to make use of half of my riches. And there was Carlo of Cesina coming to me three times a-year for the annuity I promised him if he would keep the secret, and threatening to tell it all to the good bishop. Listen a moment. You are no dastardly idiot like your late brother, whom I frightened to death. You have only to keep quiet, and let me get her out of the way for you. Don't speak! The less you know about it the better. Of course I don't mean to kill her. But at Rome the Cyprians do not live more than three years, and I can easily entice her there. In fact I have begun operations already. It is only a gay little Pippa who winds silk in the mills. I saw her this very morning. Hitherto I have kept her out of harm's way, and now I will take care that she does not trouble you. I have hired some other girls to

tell her that a rich Englishman has fallen in love with her. There is a handsome fellow from that country here ready to act the part. I see that you assent—no, I don't mean that exactly—I mean that you are willing to keep quiet, until I can turn my property into ready money and cross the Alps. The little Pippa is easily entangled through her singing. Is it a bargain?'

There is a silence, which seems like consent, but it is broken by the voice of Pippa, who sings on the doorstep below:—

'Overhead the tree-tops meet,
Flowers and grass spring 'neath one's feet;
There was nought above me, nought below,
My childhood had not learned to know:
For, what are the voices of birds
—Ay, and of beasts,—but words, our words,
Only so much more sweet?
The knowledge of that with my life begun.
But I had so near made out the sun,
And counted your stars, the seven and one,
Like the fingers of my hand:
Nay, I could all but understand
Wherefore through heaven the white moon ranges;
And just when out of her soft fifty changes
No unfamiliar face might overlook me—
Suddenly God took me.'*

Pippa's uncle calls in his servants at once to gag the tempter and carry him to prison. Then he falls on his knees, saying, 'Lord, be merciful to me a sinner!'

* *Ibid.* p. 282.

The noise of this arrest alarms the girls, who flee in all directions, leaving Pippa to go home in safety. She wonders whether they are telling her the truth about the Englishman, and is sure that at all events she will not take their advice to dress herself more showily, and spend more money for food and wine. This might do well enough in summer, but winter is always sure to come. She has picked a double heartsease in Ottima's garden, and, as she puts it beside her own lily, she fancies that a king of the flowers might hold a girl-show, and exhibit such a girl as she has just left, after feeding her until her cheeks are twice the former size, and letting her drink rich wine until her nose is red as carmine.

She has spent the day in imagining herself, Ottima, Phene, Luigi, his mother, and the Bishop, and she wonders if she can ever come near enough to any of these people to do them any good, for she has felt no sign of this as she passed by them. Perhaps she may yet do something for them, wind the silk which will embroider the hem of Ottima's robe, for instance. So she lies down to rest, utterly unconscious how that day her singing has shaped their future and her own, and goes to sleep, singing—

> 'All service ranks the same with God—
> With God, whose puppets, best and worst,
> Are we : there is no last nor first.' *

* *Ibid.* p. 287.

THE RETURN OF THE DRUSES.

Preliminary Note.

THE Druse religion still flourishes on Mount Lebanon and in other parts of Syria, and is believed to be secretly maintained in Egypt, where it was first taught at the beginning of the eleventh century, and during the reign of a crazy Caliph, who called himself Hakeem Biamrallah, that is, He who Judges by the Order of God. This sovereign was noted for his innovations and his zeal for moral and religious reforms. He took the severest measures to check intemperance and profligacy, and persecuted both Jews and Christians cruelly. Indeed the Church of the Holy Sepulchre was destroyed by him. In 1016, however, he came under the influence of two mystics, who were developing Islamism into a new religion, Hamza and Darazi. The latter seems to have given his name to the Druses. Hakeem was led by these teachers to give up all the observances peculiar to Mahometanism and to proclaim full toleration, not only for its various sects, but also for the Jews and Christians, since all other beliefs and worships seemed to him only pre-

parations for those of the true faith. This was now secretly disseminated in Cairo, and openly established on Mount Lebanon, where he is said to have insured its welcome by having great sums of money distributed among the converts. Mystic dances were instituted by his orders to symbolise the great change. He soon went so far as to claim to be the Deity incarnate, and receive divine honours from some of his courtiers. This impiety awoke an indignation which was much increased by his constant cruelty. He even commanded the old city of Cairo to be burned and the people butchered, but was obliged to disclaim his orders and sanction the defeat of his own troops by the enraged citizens. One night, in the year 1020, he disappeared, and is supposed to have been assassinated on the rocky hill of Mokattam, where the citadel of Cairo now stands.

Still the Druses revere him as their martyr, and wear black as their sacred colour in sorrow for his death. He continues to be worshipped as the last and greatest manifestation of the One and Incomprehensible, there having been nine such incarnations previously, according to his adorers, the last four being his own immediate predecessors, on the throne of Egypt, and only one appearing before Mahomet.

That the murdered Caliph was really divine is said to have been proved by his miraculous powers, especially omniscience. And by signs and portents

will he be recognised when he shall reappear in glory, surrounded by angels and archangels, to put an end to all idolatry, give the kingdoms and riches of the world to the faithful, and consign all sinners and unbelievers to penal torments. With him will reappear his forerunner, Hamza, who had previously shown himself as Abu Taleb, the teacher of Mahomet, as the real worker of all the miracles ascribed to another of his pupils, Jesus, the Son of Mary, and still earlier as David and Pythagoras. Such transformations occur continually, according to the Druses, and constitute a large part of their future rewards and punishments. Next in rank to Hamza are the four throne-angels, one of whom, formerly the missionary Bohaeddin, seems to be referred to by Browning as Bahumid the Renovator.

The Druses further believe that all other religions were designed to predict and prepare for their own, and that the latter is taught allegorically in all the so-called sacred writings, especially the Pentateuch, the Psalms, the Gospels, and the Koran. These are called the Four Books on Mount Lebanon, and treated with the utmost reverence, especially when Jews, Moslems, or Christians are present. Among the mysteries known only to those Druses who have been initiated into them is an allegorical system of interpretation, by which these four books are made to teach only the true faith, of which, for instance, a

summary is found hidden symbolically in the letters of the well-known Moslem profession of belief in Allah and Mahomet. About one sixth of the people receive this initiation at present, though it is open to both men and women of high character and suitable age. Both the religious and the political interests of the Druses are taken care of in the secret meetings of the initiated, who are called the Ockal, or Akal, a word meaning either quiet or intelligent. To this class belong the Sheikhs, Emirs, and religious teachers. Priests and monks there are none. The uninitiated who are called Djahel, or ignorant, know nothing of the mysteries of their own faith, and are not promised any share in its final triumph. Among other Druse peculiarities is the absence of polygamy, and the enjoyment of great influence and freedom by the women, who are taught to read and write.

All Druses, whether they are initiated or not, are bound to keep the seven great commandments given them by Hamza. The first of these enjoins truth of speech, especially towards other Druses. Next is a precept of mutual help, according to which the Druses call each other brother and sister, beggary is unknown, and every man wears arms continually. The third is to renounce all other religions heartily, while paying them such outward show of reverence as may be needed for personal safety. The fourth is to keep away as much as possible from all unbelievers. The

fifth is to profess the Unity of God. The sixth is to be contented with all His works. And the seventh is to obey His will implicitly. 'His decree,' says Hamza, 'will be executed none the less fully on account of thy impatience, but this will make thee a sinner. Since no one can escape what God ordains, whether he resign himself to it or not, let him accept it patiently, for this is noble and worthy of praise.'

Robert Browning represents the Druses as inhabiting, in the fifteenth century, an island near Rhodes belonging to the Knights of St. John, under whose protection they had placed themselves when they left Syria to escape destruction by the Turks. The Hospitallers, however, put these fugitives under a Prefect, who murdered all the Sheikhs with their families, and reduced the whole people to slavery, indulging his lust, avarice, and cruelty without check, since the Druse creed enjoined suffering in silence until the miraculous deliverer should be revealed. One child was saved from the massacre, after having received what was supposed to be his death-wound, and secretly sent to Europe by his nurse, who solemnly bound this boy, Djabal by name, never to forget that on him rested the duty of revenging his family and setting free his nation. In Djabal's wanderings he came to Rennes, and there won the favour of the Count of Dreux, then Duke of Brittany,

whom he told that one of his ancestors, while in Syria as a Crusader, became the progenitor of the tribe who seemed to bear his name. The Duke's son, Loys, which word would in modern French apparently be written Louis, and should be pronounced accordingly, was deeply interested, not only by this legend, but by Djabal's account of his people's wrongs. He was already eager to join the Church Militant, and was now easily persuaded to apply for admission into the Order of the Knights of St. John, and ask leave to pass his year of probation in the island of the Druses. Accordingly Loys spent his novitiate there, and learned to hate the Prefect; his sympathy with the Druses being much strengthened by his admiration of Anael, daughter of the nurse Maani, who had saved the life of Djabal.

The latter now returned to the island, so changed that even Maani did not recognise him. He tried to rouse the initiated Druses to rise against the tyrant, but found them too ready to submit to fate, as their creed enjoined. Anael, however, declared that she should love him who would free her people and punish their tyrant, and him only. Hitherto Djabal had thought only of his cause, but now, as he heard this wonderfully brave and beautiful girl promise that the deliverer should be her husband, there flashed across him a vision of himself as all this. He knew that only the appearance of Hakeem could

encourage the Druses to set themselves free. He fancied that he might himself be this Caliph of a Thousand Prophecies, and at once announced himself as such to Anael and Maani. The moon seemed to open and shut above them, as he declared that the cycle had revolved, and the time of deliverance was fully come. In his wanderings he had learned various tricks of jugglery, and now, as the initiated Druses called upon him to prove by signs and wonders that he was really the King of Prodigies, he showed them fire darting about his form, and made music accompany his steps. Hakeem was believed to have been omniscient, and Djabal showed what seemed a miraculous knowledge, not only of the Prefect's secrets, which he easily learned from Loys, but of the prospect of help from Venice, who, as he had discovered in his wanderings, hated the Knights of St. John so bitterly, and sought to extend her dominions so eagerly, that she would gladly take possession of the isle, and carry home the Druses, provided that they would set themselves free before the arrival of her fleet.

All the initiated Druses eagerly promised to obey him as their God. He commanded them to keep the secret of his incarnation until the day of their deliverance. Then they were to inform the uninitiated, rise with them against the Prefect and his guards, take possession of the island, and hand it over to the

Venetians, in whose fleet the whole nation would then sail for Mount Lebanon, under the leadership of the Hakeem. He would be manifested in all his glory as soon as the Prefect should be slain, promised Djabal, who soon succeeded in deluding himself as completely as any of his adherents. His desire to spare Loys led him to postpone the rising until the novice's probation was over, and he left the island in company with the Prefect. The latter intended on his return from Rhodes to sell a share in his power to the Nuncio of the Patriarch. Djabal had found out that there was danger of this new tyranny being established, and determined to prevent it by slaying the Prefect at noon, the very day of his return. The Venetian admiral agreed to land that afternoon, and the initiated Druses were commanded to be ready to take the lead in the revolt, Anael's brother, Khalil, being appointed as medium of communication between them and their Lord, who would keep himself apart until the time should come for him to slay the Prefect and reveal his glory. All this was done without exciting the suspicion of the Knights.

The great day breaks at last, and as the moon is carried off in the purple fire of sunrise the Druse leaders enter the Prefect's palace, throw off their cloaks and hoods, and show themselves in the black robes and white turbans, which signify that they have risen through initiation into the ruling caste, and which their

tyrants have prescribed under pain of death. The palace is so far deserted that they are able to express freely their delight that the time has come for Djabal to resume his former shape and functions, and reappear as the Divine Caliph, who vanished four centuries before on Mount Mokattam, in what to the ignorant seemed death, but is now to show himself—a glory like the morning's—and lead back to Lebanon her sons, the guardians of the world's secret. 'Death to the Prefect! Joy to thee, O Mother Mount! Hail, God Hakeem!' they shout as they begin to spoil the spoiler and tear down the rich ornaments of the hall. They are quarrelling over a golden fringe which the son of one of them had been set to twist the very night he died, when Khalil, the vicegerent, enters and commands them to keep up the appearance of submission until noon. So unwilling are they to obey that he is obliged to remind them of the fire they have seen sparkle round the Master, and the strange music they have heard floating about his form, and to threaten them with the divine wrath. At this they yield, saying to each other, 'Djabal is Hakeem, the Incarnate Terror!'

Other Druses, who have been on watch since daybreak, soon hasten, one after another, to announce to Khalil that the Prefect is landing from Rhodes, that the Nuncio's galley is drawing near, and, finally, that the fleet of Venice is looming up like a cloud in the horizon. Then there is great rejoicing, and Khalil,

after sending parties of his confederates to receive the Prefect and the Nuncio with all the wonted show of servitude and in the prescribed costume, bids the rest summon the whole tribe together, reveal the great secret, that the mystic cycle is at length completed and their Hakeem come back to earth to reign once more, and announce that they are all to return to Mount Lebanon ere sunset.

They are about to leave the hall when Sir Loys meets them, delighted at the joy he sees in their faces, and wondering if they can have heard already that his indignant appeals have moved the Chapter of Knights to depose the Prefect and empower him to assume the office that very day. Some of the Druses wish to stab him at once, but Khalil forbids it, because this is the only Christian whom they can charge with no tyranny. He is so provoked, however, at the young Frank's insisting on seeing Djabal, as to say, 'You may meet him at noon in the Prefect's chamber;' but at last he promises that Loys shall have his friend come speedily. So the Druses leave their champion waiting in the palace, full of joy at what he is going to do for his harmless fellow-Christians as he calls them, and without a fear, except that Anael's great black eyes may look at him too powerfully.

Meantime Djabal has but just become conscious how he has deceived himself and his friends, and how sad a delusion has mixed itself insensibly with

his great work. Now he begins to see that he is not the Hakeem, and that no miraculous glory is waiting for him. So he says to himself, as he hurries into the palace to meet his accomplices, 'Avaunt, Falsehood! Thou shalt have no more hold on me! I find that I have been deceiving and deceived. I will hasten to the few whom I have misled, and open their eyes before they delude the others. I will say to the elders, "You know how my father, and mother, and brothers fell. Do you wonder that, after roaming over the world in search of vengeance, and finding that it could come only by the return of the Caliph of a Thousand Prophecies, I fancied that my mission might be his? Would he do more than I have done? Truly, I believed all I professed. Pardon me, and do not put me to shame before all our tribe!" They will forgive me, and then I will slay the Prefect, and lead back my people to Mount Lebanon, not as Caliph but as Sheikh, mere Djabal, not ——'

'God Hakeem!' shouted Khalil, hastening to meet him and prostrating himself before him, 'All is told! The whole Druse nation knows thee, Hakeem, as we do. Mothers lift on high their babes, whose great eyes glisten as if they knew that thou wouldst not fail us. Ancient brows are proud. The shamed Druse women are weeping now. They say they can look up when they reach home. Our children are joining in the sacred dances, which of old thou didst

command us. The whole Druse heart is thine. Take it! Be thou adored!'

'Adored!' muttered his idol. 'I renounce it utterly.'

'Alas, that I can announce to thee, their Lord and mine, only what thou knowest already, that the Prefect, the Nuncio, and the Admiral are, at this moment, drawing near by their three several paths. How wrapt he is! Can I break in upon him now, even at my sister's bidding? Yes, his eyes are still only Djabal's, and not yet our Hakeem's. My lord, listen to me! Anael would fain speak with thee before thou change and discard this shape of Djabal, which she knows, for that of Hakeem, which she is to know. Something is on her mind.'

'Anael!' says her lover to himself, 'I went on solely for my people's sake till I saw her. Then I thought of myself, and of becoming Hakeem before her eyes.' He turns to Khalil with, 'My Druses whom I must save, and whom I suffer for, are they all at their posts?'

'All are panting to flock around that banner of a brow!'

'And must I confess to them, when they flock together, and be chased by their howlings to her feet? —You are a Druse, Khalil, nurtured in our mysteries. You longed, like your sister, for the deliverance. Why did you not attempt it?'

'I did!' replied Khalil. 'I went to the wronged, and spoke, "The Prefect stabbed your son. Avenge him! Your daughter eats shameless bread in his harem, while you starve. Rise against him!" All they would answer was, "Be silent, or we shall fare yet worse. We must endure until time's slow cycle is complete. Who are you to thrust yourself into danger? Are you Hakeem?" No, only such a mission as thine can make them brave and loyal! Even this morning, with our deliverance at hand and thy miracles fresh in memory, they would have plundered the palace, and fled each to his own hut with his booty, leaving our hopes to perish, if I had not threatened them with Hakeem's wrath. No, when they are back in Lebanon, I or any one else may rule them. They need thee now.'

At this Djabal decides not to confess his fault to the multitude until he has made such a success as shall be some excuse for the means he took. So he sends Khalil to say that he is coming to Anael; for to her, and her alone, will he confess all. And this he is resolved to do, even if her brow were brighter and her eyes richer. How can he slay the Prefect while he is fettered thus?

He finds Anael arrayed in the ancient dress of the Druse maidens, and so wearing a naked dagger with its sharp edge towards her heart. She has been asking her mother which of his features will be

changed, when he shall manifest himself as Hakeem, and hoping it will not be his eyes, though Maani tells her it is written that their Caliphs' eyes rolled fire, and clove the dark superbly.

'It may be his voice,' says the girl. 'There always was a grand current flowing under every word of his. No, I cannot lose a single tone. I hope he may only put on the radiance like a robe, and still be himself within it. Oh, my people, how I rejoice, and even more for you than for myself! How proud I should be only to see our Hakeem pass! But to be exalted with him, to lead the exulting Druses home, to meet those maidens who ever wait for us with their tabrets beneath the cedars! What can I do to deserve this? O mother, I am not worthy of him! Always I feel that he is sufficient for me in his mere human gifts. All worship and awe fade away as he draws near. So it is even now. Tell me, my Djabal, why it is that I cannot kneel to thee?'

She attempted to do so, however, but he raises her, saying, 'Rather let me kneel to you, my Anael!'

'Nay, let me tell the truth,' she insisted. 'I can never look upon thee as a God. Is it before me or my people that thou wearest a veil? Oh, give me time to become more worthy of thee!'

Here she stops, struck by the conviction that all the power which Djabal has over her would have been exerted by Loys if she had loved him.

Djabal, however, still supposes that she loves nothing in him but his claim to divinity, and can find no words to tell her that this is false. It seems to be the prop on which her love has climbed, like a flower, and spread out its rich wealth of leaf and blossom, so that the support, vile as it is, cannot be taken away without letting all this beauty fall. So he tells himself that it is not for his own sake but hers; he wishes to leave her soul the faith on which she leans. If he could only quit the isle!

'And why shall I not go? My work here is done. The Druses must return, whoever may be their leader. Venice is pledged to carry them. All I stay for now is my own vengeance on the Prefect. He can do no further harm. His death is nothing except as my own reward. I resign it! Let him escape with all my house's blood upon him. Before he touch land, Djabal shall disappear and Hakeem live evermore in Anael's memory, keeping her sublime above the world. She can never know what I truly am, for Loys, the only one who knows my arts and could unmask me, is safe at Rhodes, and——'

'Loys greets thee!' says Khalil, returning quickly. 'I forgot to tell thee that he is back again with twice his old light-heartedness.'

'And asking for me?'

'Thou knowest all things! He says that he must

see thee, and that he is going to make all us Druses happy. How I love him!'

Djabal, in order to keep Loys occupied until he can take him away from the island, sends Anael to speak with him. This makes her believe that he reads her thoughts, and puts this test on her to show her how much his divine gifts surpass all merely human charms.

When the young knight says that her breath passes through him and draws his spirit to her, as Heaven does the wine poured out in sacrifice, she bids him leave her at once, for it was not to hear such mad protestations that she came to him, and she can love no one except him who removes the Prefect, raises her nation, and gives them back their ancient rights. He thinks that he is the only man who can win her love. Yet, alas! he is the only one unable to accept it. Now he sees that it was solely for her sake he has espoused her people's cause. His first thought is of Djabal's help, but when he asks where his friend is, Anael, like Khalil, bids him meet Djabal in the Prefect's chamber that very noon. He feels that it only needs one word from his old friend to make him renounce his knighthood and nation, and betray the trust confided to him by his brothers of the pure, white Cross. Better that he hasten to the Prefect and the Nuncio, so that he may renew his vows in time to have them put down his heart's rebellion.

Thus Anael is left alone to tell herself, that though she prefers Djabal to Loys, it is merely as man over man. And is it to reward such a love that the God who saves her race has chosen her for his bride? No; she must do something to make herself worthy of his love, and there is one grand but dreadful deed to do. So, when Djabal comes in search of Loys, with whom he means to leave the island for ever, she is confirmed in her purpose by his avoiding the embrace she offers. She tells him she made a vow not to embrace him until their people is saved: but now the time is come. He fears to let himself be tempted to stay with her, and so reminds her that the Prefect is not yet slain. She asks if death is not terrible, and he answers, 'It needs but one blow to set free the tyrant's weary soul from the flesh that pollutes it, and let him fill some new expiatory shape.' And when she entreats him to give her a chance to show herself worthy of him, he tells her that such an occasion is at hand, but it is likely that they part for ever. So she thinks he reads her thoughts and approves her purpose.

He is trying to bid her farewell, when Khalil rushes in to say that the Prefect is already entering the palace, the Nuncio about to land, the fleet of Venice drawing near, all the initiated Druses at their posts, and the Caliph's mystic robe, sword, and tiara ready in the chamber, where the great blow of ven-

geance must be struck. It is too late for Djabal to draw back, and he can only give his last orders. Khalil shall announce to him the landing of the Venetians, and meantime the Nuncio is to be surrounded by the main body of the Druses and kept a prisoner, until Anael shall bring the news that the Prefect is slain. Then the whole nation is to march through the detested halls and look on the slaughtered tyrant before they embark The poor girl asks once more if Djabal is to be exalted as soon as the Prefect dies. He answers that as soon as that one moment's work is done, not only he himself, but she and all the other Druses, shall be exalted instantly.

Then they leave the hall, as the old Prefect enters with Loys, at whose command he sends back all his guards to his galley, for the young knight insists on his embarking as soon as the installation is over.

'But I'm glad enough to go!' laughs the villain. 'Indeed I should not have given up half of my power to the Nuncio, if I had not wished to have him take half of the peril also. Why, Sir Loys, I should love you if you'd let me; for you're saving my life at the risk of your own. It is a long time since our Hospitallers sent me here and bade me tame these savage wizards and reward myself.'

'The Knights who renounce you and your crimes?'

'Oh, I understood them! And I knew that there would be no reward, except what I could take on the spot. I found it sweet, but I grow old, and

'Stinging pleasures please less and sting more.'*

'True, there's one Anael left yet, whom I set my heart upon.'

At this Loys is about to draw his sword, but the old man entreats him to let it lie quiet, and goes on, 'Even with this alcove's delights mingled visions of gaunt fathers and agile sons, fleeing from the mines and galleys, and stealing in to stab me. In short, all really worth staying for was gained and gone, and no way of escape seemed open, when up jumped you, talked very loud and fine, and compelled the Knights to send me away from this island, where ten thousand Druses seek my life, and banish me to Murcia, where my three fat manors, purchased with my gains here and the Nuncio's gold, are waiting for me. I did not expect such good fortune, and I am ready to love you for it, I say.'

'I'll go back and unmask you to the whole Order!'

'To whom? To Sir Galeas, who shook his grey head thrice as he heard you, and shook my hand half-a-dozen times this morning as I paid him his dues? To that Italian saint, Sir Cosimo, who was

* *Works*, 1868, v. 3, Act iii.

so aggrieved at my wringing a thousand bezants a-year from those coral-divers, as he might well be, for I allow him only a hundred as his half.'

'How can it be that they approved of your rule here, since it needed only my voice to make them end it?'

'Oh, do you suppose they cared nothing for the son of the Duke of Brittany, who could bring his father's wealth and influence, besides his own zeal and courage, to the Order? Do you think they would have been perfectly satisfied if you had left them for their rivals of the Red Cross, and turned Templar? Well, stay here till they withdraw you, and believe me, if you choose, when I say that this is the first time for long years that I have drawn aside the curtain before my alcove, without feeling as if I were lifting the lid of my tomb.'

'God's punishment will overtake you yet.'

'I may thank you that it does not. When we next meet you will have outgrown this folly. Ha! ha!'

But the laugh with which he passes behind the curtain into his bed-chamber, soon changes into a dying groan, to which, however, Loys does not listen, for he thinks of nothing but finding his old friend, and telling him that he is going to give up rank, family, and knighthood, for Anael's sake, and become a Druse. Scarcely has he left the hall when Djabal enters, puts on the sacred robe, and draws the

Caliph's sword. He is in doubt whether he may assume the tiara also, when he hears steps behind the curtain, and thinks they are the Prefect's, though he marvels that feet clogged with the blood of twenty years can fall so lightly. Ghosts seem crowding around him as he lifts the arras with his sword, and finds—Anael! She screams as he asks what she does there, where he must slay the Prefect. Then she shows her bloody dagger, and says, 'Djabal, this is thy deed! I hoped to claim it for my own, and so be worthy of thee, but I cannot. Djabal, speak to me!'

But he can only murmur, 'Oh, my punishment!'

'Speak to me!' she insists; 'touch me! When the command passed from thy soul to mine, I went, thy fire leading me, and the exaltation drawing near. "Offer one sacrifice," I said. And he sate there and bade me approach. Then thy fire and music burst into my brain. Thou saidst it would be but a moment's work; perhaps it was. Well, it is thy deed.'

'It is my deed!'

'But all this blood. Sustain me, Djabal! Wait no longer! let thy glory flash forth! Change thyself and me! Strengthen me before the Druses come! He was our tyrant; but I thought he would fall asleep. Why else is death called sleep? Oh, the blood! I know I sin. Punish me thyself, but do

not let him! He creeps on his red breast, and is here already. Give the new life! It cannot be too strange, too swift, too surpassing!'

He tries to retreat, but she follows him, and implores him to change himself and her. At last he falls on his knees, saying, 'Behold my change!'

'Can Hakeem kneel?' she asks.

'No Hakeem! mere Djabal. I spoke falsely, and this woe has come. Oh, think of the past!'

'Did I strike once, or twice, or many times?' falters Anael.

'I came to lead my people home. I saw the Druses, Anael, and I said, "This cannot be without a miracle." Then I saw you, and I said, "Let there be a miracle." How could I, so weighed down with the general good, think of my own purity of soul? Little by little I was drawn in. I hoped Heaven would accept me as its instrument, and then I thought that Heaven had accepted me.'

'Is it the blood that makes me dream?' she exclaims. 'Who said that thou art not Hakeem? And thy miracles,—the fire that plays around thee harmless! Ah, thou wouldst try me. Thou art Hakeem still!'

At this he starts up, crying, 'Woe! woe! How can you, Druses, understand the subtle lore of Europe? The best of you overcome by such tricks as merely amuse the crowd there!'

Anael stands awhile, utterly confounded, and then springs to his neck.

'Nay, Djabal, there can be no deceit in this. No merely human looks and words, not those of my mother, or my brother, or even of Loys, could be to me what thine are. Shame on thee to try me thus! Rather shame on me to need trying so! How could I, with that old man's blood on me, see only thee, and hang by thy neck over this gulf of gore, if thou were not Hakeem? Speak, and save me!'

But Djabal slowly unclasps her arms in silence, and puts her away from him; and at last she says, 'Hakeem would save me! You are the basest of our kind! The pile of you I built up to the clouds, full of our father's trophied tombs, is fallen to the dust; fire and music are all quenched. Now you are only a ruin obscene creatures will moan through! Let us hasten, Djabal.'

'Whither?'

'To the Druses you have wronged. At once, for it will grow intolerable. Will I not bear it with you? Let them all deride you, and Loys, too. Confess it all now. The end is gained; I love you better than ever. Shame with the man be mine, and not triumph with the god! Come!

But Djabal refuses, and demands, 'Why need there be more shame still? You have called this deed mine; it is so: I accept all its circumstances.

How can I strive longer against my fate? The past is past. Listen! the argosies touch land ere now. Let them bear us to fresh scenes and happier skies. What if we reign together, and keep our secret for the Druses' good? plant in them new life by means of their superstition? I learnt in Europe that all who seek the good of man must awe him thus.

> 'All great works in this world spring from the ruins
> Of greater projects—ever, on our earth,
> Babels men block out, Babylons they build.'*

He wrests the dagger from her hand, and bids her announce that he has slain the Prefect, and that the Nuncio is to be closely guarded until the Venetians come. She departs in silence, with fierce, distorted lips and frowning brows, and full of horror at seeing him put on the tiara to feign Hakeem, in violation of the first commandment, which binds the Druses to mutual fidelity. Djabal is waiting for Khalil to announce the arrival of the fleet, when Loys comes to relate what he has done at Rhodes.

'You are really Prefect, now,' he says; 'though I am so in name. And here I throw down all I have built up; I shall never be a Knight. I cast aside all my prejudices, Djabal, and call you brother; I am a Druse like you. My wealth is yours; your nation is

* *Ibid.* Act iv. l. 160.

mine. I love a maiden of your tribe, Khalil's sister, Anael, and she loves me.'

He has scarcely spoken this, when some of the Nuncio's guards rush in, and tell Loys that the Prefect has been murdered by the very man he is embracing. Loys bids them stand back from his friend, who must have been provoked by some insult worse than death.

'No,' urge the guards, 'there was no provocation; it is a conspiracy of all the tribe. He claims to be their Caliph, who died long ago, and has come to life again. One of his confederates has told the Nuncio all, out of horror at the murder; yes, told us where to find this Djabal.'

'Do you hear them?' says Loys to his friend. 'Speak! Till you do, I will keep them off, or die with you. You an impostor! you who told me how inoffensive your race was! It was on your story that I pledged my faith to the Knights. Tell me what you are?'

Djabal has been wondering who betrayed him, but now he tells Loys, as he flings down the bloody dagger, which he had hidden under his robe, 'I am what you have heard. All is true! All was planned long ago. My Druses will easily crush this handful; the Venetians are landing even now in our behalf; so we part here. You have helped me much, and would have helped me more. It

may not be. We are a separated race. I thank you; but farewell.'

'Oh, where is truth?' exclaims Loys. 'And those Druses who you said were of my own Breton kin! Khalil my friend and Anael who loves me! Do they share your crime?'

'Poor boy! Khalil your friend? Anael love you? We Druses of your race? Nay, we are older than Europe's most ancient family, princelier than her princeliest. Our monarchy rests on our faith to each other, which will let one of our children sit, and laugh on the steps of the palace of those whom he knows we shall slay ere night. We wait for a boy to help us? Khalil your friend? He is my right hand. Anael love you? She is my bride.'

'She? With those glorious eyes? And yet she told me I should find Djabal here. So did Khalil. All is true; the Prefect said nothing worse of them than this: Did the Church ill to wage war on such serpents? Can I escape my part in the fight?'

'Loys, I wronged you, but it was in ignorance. I never thought you could love thus a race beneath your own. All is over now, except the protection I will give you against my people. By my side you are safe, and may depart in peace.'

'I take protection from you!'

'Take it, Sir Loys,' says another of the guards, who has but just entered. 'The whole nation is in

revolt, and there are but twenty of us to resist them; the Nuncio stands aghast. We should all have died together if one faithful Druse had not warned us.—O, Hakeem, let us escape thy wrath! We have had no hand in thy tribe's persecution.—Keep by his side, Sir Loys!'

But he snatches up the dagger which Djabal has thrown down and seizes him by the throat.

'Thus am I by his side! Thus I resume my knighthood! Miscreant, you are caught! Your dupes may flock without in hordes and call you their God, but here am I, the youngest and meanest servant of the Church, and I crush you. I am for the Cross, Honour, and Faith against Hell and you. Die!' But finding Djabal so calm that he cannot strike him, he continues, 'Implore my mercy, Hakeem, that my scorn may help me to strike! No, I cannot ply your trade. I am no Druse, no stabber. Your eye and form are too much like my friend's. Heaven cannot ask so much of me! I cannot kill him thus. You have heard that one of your own people accuses you. Meet him with me and disprove his charge, or let him speak your sentence. Promise me this, or I will do God's office. Shall Truth lack even an executioner? Consent, or I strike! Look in my face!'

'Give me my dagger then, if you dare. Let one single Druse accuse me and I will plunge this home. A Druse betray me!—Who can have done so?' he

repeats to himself. Then, as he hears his people shouting, he says to Loys, who has given him back the dagger, 'Listen! I hear those shouts no plainer now than I did years ago. It is no dream now. They return! Will you be leader with me, Loys?'

But he recoils in horror, and they depart together to the Nuncio, who, with his remaining guards, is surrounded in the great outer hall by the whole body of uninitiated Druses. They are in wild tumult, ready to fight if need be, but very doubtful whether they will be any better off for returning to Lebanon. At length they are almost persuaded by the Nuncio that Djabal is a wicked sorcerer, who has sunk the galley full of bezants which the Patriarch sent them, and has confessed that he was about to give them up to demons, summoned to seize them by his spells. They tell each other that they know nothing about Djabal but what the initiated Druses say, and they know only what Djabal says himself. So they join the guards in attacking Khalil when he enters with his confederates. He tells them that the Venetians are landing to carry them to Lebanon, but they shout, 'We are the Patriarch's children! The Patriarch trades in oil and silk, and we are true men! Where is the glory? Show it to us!'

Khalil rushes to meet Djabal, and implores him to reveal his glory at once as he sees him enter in the Frank knight's custody.

'Well done, Loys!' declares the Nuncio. 'And you, Hakeem, as you call yourself. I arrest you for the murder of your prince. Now try your spells and miracles!'

'What need of spells?' answers the Druse chief. 'The Venetian Admiral is at hand. If he stoop to aid you, we will see what spells can do. Will you resist the Republic?'

The Nuncio reminds the Druses that one of their own nation has confessed that Djabal is an impostor, and calls on them to stab him; but he thunders out, 'Let him who moves perish at my feet!'

Then they retire, talking to each other of the live fire which has been seen to play around him, and saying, 'See, the change begins! How his brow flashes as he lifts his arm! Do not look at me. It was not I!'

'What Druse accuses me? I bid each bone crumble within him!'

Here a veiled Druse is led in by the guards, and a ring is formed, in the centre of which stand the witness, the Nuncio, the accused, his second in command, and his captor. Loys says, 'Now, Djabal, is your dagger ready?' Khalil, despite the warnings of his fellow Druses, tears off the new comer's veil. It is Anael! Djabal folds his arms and bows his head before her; but Loys springs to her side, exclaiming, 'And she was true, she alone of them all! And she

may keep her glorious eyes! She may be mine still. Oh, Anael! why did I think that you could share his crime and soil your hand with blood? It is mine now! Not mine?' he asks, as she withdraws it. 'I offer you my sword, my heart, my name. Only say that he lies when he boasts you are his bride!'

Djabal is about to speak, but his rival checks him with, 'Nay, give me but this one chance. You have had every other. You have spoken falsehood as you pleased for nights and days. Let me speak now.'

'Pause, Loys!' entreats the Nuncio. 'You, son of the Duke of Brittany, and first sword of God's sepulchre, will you spit on all this?'

'Would I had all this in real shape before me, Anael, that I might see you trample on it! But it is not by gifts that I would put Djabal aside. Here we stand, I who have kept my course purely and openly, and he with his lies and blood. Oh, Anael, love me! Leave that blood and him!'

Now he bids Djabal speak for himself, but the Druse can only say, 'And it was you betrayed me, Anael? It is well! I deserve this and submit. It is not a great evil. Life ends here. The cedars shall not wave for us. There has been crime, and must be punishment. I sinned for you, and by you I perish. I can be nothing, either as an Arab prophet or a Frankish schemer. Each of these has destroyed the other; and out of their wreck rises something better,

my own man's nature. I yield to it and love you, as I have not done before. How could I love you while you were adoring me? Now you despise me and are immeasurably above me. You doom me to death; this dagger shall execute your sentence; and I shall feel your hand in it. Oh, what a luxury to be doomed by you!'

'My Djabal!' she murmurs.

'Why do you hesitate?' he urges. 'Speak the truth! Hear it, my Druses! Listen, Nuncio and Loys!'

But Anael sinks under her terror for her lover, and disappointment, uttering, with her dying breath, a wild cry of

'Hakeem!'

'Hakeem!' scream all the Druses, grovelling on their faces. 'Withhold thy wrath! I never doubted thee!'

Loys flings himself on Anael's body, but Khalil kneels before Djabal, and says, timidly, 'Save her for my sake, oh, Hakeem! It is so easy for thee to give back her life. See how she smiles! She believes in thee now. Look at the soft, bright hair, plaited for thee this morning. Do not go without her to the cedars, or leave us both. Raise her before thou exalt thyself, oh, Lord!'

The Nuncio hears this, and calls out to the Druses, who are about to trample him under their feet, 'Look to your Caliph! Is that ghastly face God

Hakeem's? Where is the glory he promised you? I challenge him to exalt himself. If he can, I will myself become a Druse.'

At this they all shout, 'Exalt thyself, O Hakeem!'

Then Djabal advances to them, saying, 'I can confess all now from first to last. For me there is no more shame. I am——'

Here he is interrupted by a peal of trumpets from the Venetians, who are about to enter the palace. The Druses shout; his eye catches the expression of their faces; his old dream comes back; and it is with full confidence in his inspiration, that he declares, 'Am I not Hakeem? But yesterday ye would have crawled into these foul courts, where now ye stand upright. Am I not grand enough for you? Will ye forsake me now, with Venice close at hand, the Nuncio caught thus, and, best of all, the Prefect lying yonder?'

'No, Hakeem! We are thine for ever!'

'Druses,' says their chief, 'henceforth we shall be far away, out of mortal sight, above the cedars. But we shall see you return there. Khalil, you shall lead them. Behold, I fill you with mine own power. My hands fill thee thus. Lead my people home. And ye, my Druses, ye bow to him as before me. Ye will follow him to Lebanon.'

'We will follow him!' shout the Druses. 'Now exalt thyself.'

But Djabal raises Loys from Anael's corpse and says, 'How I have wronged you! You shall have full revenge, fit for your own princely soul. You, the first sword of Christ's sepulchre, shall guard Khalil and my Druses home. This is simple justice, God's justice, and nothing more. Give a few days of your brilliant life thus. Then leave Lebanon with the blessings of my Druses, such blessings as shall have their way, one cedar-blossom in your Ducal cap, one thought of Anael in your heart, perhaps some thought, too, of him who speaks his last word to any of the living, as he bids you God speed. Be first among the first in Europe.'

Then he bends over Anael, whispering, 'And, last to you. Did I dream I was to exalt you this day? A vain dream! You have won greater exaltation. What remains but for me to rise to you? Thus I exalt myself and set free my soul.'

He stabs himself, and, as he sinks into the arms of Khalil and Loys, the Venetians enter the hall, the Admiral exclaiming, 'God and St. Mark for Venice! Plant the Lion!'

At the clash of the planting of this standard the Druses shout and rush forwards; Loys draws his sword; Djabal moves a few steps between his two friends, and then dies, crying, 'On to the Mountain! At the Mountain, Druses!'

COLOMBE'S BIRTHDAY.

COLOMBE was the daughter of William, Duke of Cleves and Juliers, which two states had long formed one principality, and was kept concealed by her father, who knew that her title would be contested under the Salic law, according to which no woman could wear that crown. So she was left to reign queen over the water-buds on the Meuse until the Duke's death in 1609, when his courtiers took her from her half-ruined castle of Ravestein and brought her, after a magnificent reception, given by the manufacturers of Cleves, to the palace at Juliers, which she entered on her birthday amid crowds of worshippers.

The blue-eyed girl has reigned one year, with wreaths in her hair, songs on her lips, masquerades and other pageants going on continually, and no fear of rival claimants disturbing her gaiety; when her birthday comes once more, and finds a few courtiers waiting in the corridor before her audience-chamber, wondering whether any others will join them, and what they are to do with a summons just received

from her cousin, Prince Berthold. The young man announces, that he has been recognised as Duke by the Pope, the Emperor, the kings of France and Spain, and other potentates, and that he will arrive with a body of troops at noon that very day to claim possession of the principality. This letter he wishes to have presented to the Duchess, but Sir Guibert, whose office requires him to deliver it, flings it on the floor, and declares that he is not going to break his lady's heart, and that whoever chooses to run the risk of doing so is welcome to have his place thenceforth.

They have no idea of resisting the Prince, but they cannot make up their minds what to do with his summons, and they are idly lamenting the smallness of their own number and the emptiness of the outer porch, which the year before swarmed with suitors of low rank, when they learn that one of these latter has really come there.

A young man, with close-curled hair, high forehead, and thin, sour face, has been waiting in travel-stained garments since daybreak, and consoling himself with a manuscript at which he glances whenever the rude answers of the guards to his requests to see the Duchess make his cheeks flush. He has claimed that he is known to Sir Guibert, but without avail. At last he sees him, dashes aside the halberdiers, and enters with torn cloak and disordered dress, saying, 'Sir Guibert, will you help me? Your starving towns-

men of Cleves have sent me here to show our depths of woe to our Duchess. Such errands barricade such doors, it seems; but no common hindrance will drive me back on the sad faces who sent me forth. Cleves, speak for me! Speak, men and women of Cleves, who followed me, the strongest of you, many a mile, who sit, the weakest of you, by the city gates, waiting for my return. Oh, I implore you, Sir Guibert, remember Cleves! They remember you so well. And if you can forget that grand old town, whose men and women starve, then remember me. You promised once to help me. Will you keep your word?'

'And who may you be, friend?' says Guibert.

'Valence of Cleves.'

'Valence—not the Advocate, to whom I owed my whole estate three years ago, when I was so nearly ousted by some knave's pretext? I have tried before to tempt you here, and now you shall see the Duchess. But do you mean simply to make a bow to her and launch at once on all the miseries you have there, written down so closely?'

'How could they let me pause or turn aside?' replies Valence, who, when other courtiers ask him if he knows that this is the birthday of their lady, her day of pleasure, says

> 'That the great, I know,
> For pleasure born, should still be on the watch
> To exclude pleasure when a duty offers;

Even as, for duty born, the lowly too
May ever snatch a pleasure if in reach:
Both will have plenty of their birthright!' *

He has been so busy with his townsmen's wrongs that he has heard nothing about Prince Berthold, whose summons he readily agrees to present to the Duchess, when Guibert, after much urging from the brother courtiers, asks this favour in return for that of the introduction.

Meantime Colombe has begun to suspect, from the unwillingness of her attendants to let her receive her courtiers at the hour appointed, that these latter are wavering in their allegiance; but she fears that it is too late for her to go back to what she was before her life was shut up by them in the Ducal crown, which, if rudely plucked away, will leave her to perish. So she receives the courtiers, with whom comes Valence, who is full of the memory of that golden moment when she tarried at Cleves, and he spoke the city's welcome. Then the sight of her made him hers, as he will be to the end. Her people are his charge, as they could not have been if she had not raised his soul to them, and given them into his heart as she left him. When he sees all her wondrous face at once the ground reels under him; but he tells himself what wrongs he has to plead. Then

* *Works*, 1868, Vol. IV. Act i. p. 75.

she calls him to her and says, 'How fresh in my mind is the hour I passed at queenly Cleves. She entertained me bravely, but the best of her pageant was the people with joy on every face. What says my ancient, famous, happy Cleves?'

'Take the truth, lady, you are made for it,' answers Valence. 'My friends think so, and they deserve having you to hear the truth from them. On that day at Cleves you remember so well, the poor, patient multitude thrust themselves with all their woes into unnoticed corners, that the few whom the rest could supply with trappings might fill the foreground with joyous faces, fit for you to bear away. Then they crept out, once more clutching the empty rags, from which that morning they had shaken out the scanty coin that would not have half bought bread, and spent it all on perfumes to burn, or flowers to strew before you. And then, when the golden flood of music and rejoicing had ebbed, as you, their moon, retreated, and the sharp black rocks of misery were bare again, I had merely to suggest, "If she only saw the horror as she has seen the pomp." They all cried as one man, "Show her the horror! Let her see our wrongs." Lady, I have brought those wrongs.'

'Wrongs! Has my Cleves wrongs? And in that paper? I thank you. Give it to me.'

He is about to do so when he remembers his

promise that he would first lay the Prince's summons at her feet, and proceeds to fulfil his agreement. Guibert tries to check him, but the Duchess supposes that this paper also is a petition from the people of Cleves, and insists on reading it at once, saying, 'I take aught that teaches me their wrongs with greater pride than this ducal circlet.'

She reads it hastily, as she finds that it is the summons to resign her duchy. Then she turns to the courtiers and exclaims, 'What have I done to you? Was crowning me my deed or yours? I no more gave myself the title to your homage than do the flowers you carry into church. For such a flower you plucked me and now you would throw me away. You should remember that I have lain enshrined. Yet fling me forth!' She pauses a moment, and then takes off her coronet, with the words, 'Prince Berthold, who art chosen Duke of Juliers by kings, and Emperor, and Pope, you shall be my choice, too. Take this people, whom I yearn to give you. Find out their love, as I could not. Find their fear, as I would not, I, who shall never find their like, among the flowers. Colombe, of Ravestein, thanks God that she is no longer Duchess here.'

Then Valence turns on Guibert with, 'Sir Guibert, this is my first step at court. You have dared to make me your instrument in insulting this lady. For that we reckon to the utmost as soon as we are

out of her presence. But in that presence there is surely something to be done. I have outraged her too deeply, through my ignorance of courtiers' tricks, to address her again; but do you, gentlemen, tell me, May I not strike this man to earth?'

They interpose, as does Colombe, who tells Valence, 'Remember that he is a nobleman, and that he will be all the more in honour with the new Duke, for what this gallant turn deserves. He has already, I daresay, a thousand times as much power and influence as are left to me. I would not have you suffer for taking my part.'

'Then I may strike him!' exclaims her champion.

Guibert, however, falls on his knees before Colombe, and protests that only fear of paining her kept him and his fellows from giving her the summons themselves, and led them to show her that the only one of her subjects willing to present it was a nameless, provincial lawyer, who did not know its contents. Much as she objects to hearing her advocate called nameless and provincial, she readily pardons Sir Guibert, but Valence will not. He leaves him for the moment, however, to say, 'Dare I speak, Lady?'

'Dare you? I rule no longer.'

'Lady, if your rule were based only on these men, you might well resign it. But they have hidden from you a source of true power. Look at Cleves! Her haggard craftsmen rose this day to starve, are starving

now, and will starve to-morrow. What curbs their instinct to brute force, and keeps them from rising as one man, and teaching such expert fingers how to wield the broadsword and carbine? They trust in you, whose name so few of them can spell, whose face scarcely one in a hundred ever saw, and think that you have only to know their misery to make it vanish. So the trades are still plied, the swords lie rusting, and I am here. In each one's heart there is a vision of justice, mercy, and wisdom, of tenderness to wrong and pain, and knowledge how to cure them of these, embodied in a woman, who transmits them to mankind, pure as when she first received them from God. Will you rest your rule on such a ground, or else hold it by the suffrage of this man here—and this—and this?'

She asks him how many there are of such a mind in his city, and he replies by reading from the petition, 'We, all the manufacturers of Cleves——'

She demands if she really is all this to him, though to no other man, and again he reads, 'Valence, ordained your advocate at Cleves.'

'Then I remain her Duchess,' says she, and puts on her coronet once more. 'Take note, you, that while Cleves gives me but one such subject, I stand her lady. For her sake I keep all that Prince Berthold claims, laugh at his threats, defy his power, and return his summons with all due contempt.'

With these words she crumples it up and throws

it away. Guibert picks it up, and volunteers to return it as her representative. She replies that this charge belongs to some subject of hers. She is not sure whether it may be best performed by her marshal, her chancellor, or her chamberlain, but all these posts she offers to Valence. He kneels at her feet, while she bids her courtiers return to her all their badges of office. Then she raises her champion and bids him follow her, saying, 'Are you mine?—I will be Duchess yet!'

The courtiers are for the moment inclined to imitate Valence, but all, except Guibert, resolve to side with Prince Berthold, as soon as they hear of his arrival. That afternoon he enters Juliers with no companion but a student named Melchior. The latter answers to the avowal of the Prince, that he cares for the Duchy mainly as a help to becoming Emperor. 'I, too, seek to win a dukedom, namely, the meaning of that tough old Platonist, Amelius, whom your uncle, the Pope, has just unearthed.'

'And then,' says Berthold, 'empire for you will be——'

'Making out your uncle's commentary,' says the scholar, who complains that his friend is not winning Cleves and Juliers chivalrously. The Prince replies that the quality of things may be judged in the next world, but their size is the question in this. He is so confident of success that he has left all his soldiers at

Aix-la-Chapelle, and when Guibert repeats Colombe's defiance he at first supposes himself a prisoner. Then Valence tells him, 'The lady is alone, but I shall bring all Cleves to fight you to the last. You may make Juliers a pool of blood, but you shall never be its duke. You may lord it over soldiers, whose force you concentrate into a pillared flame, and amid priests, whose schemes you enlarge into a cloud of smoke, under which all shadows brood. You can never be our Colombe, whose subjects are ready to pour forth their blood like water to enrich the soil where she would gather lilies for her hair.'

Berthold is struck with such awe he submits his claims to Valence for decision, gives him the summons and all the papers which justify it, and declares that he will await the advocate's opinion before taking further steps. So the Prince takes his leave until evening of the Duchess, who has let Valence speak for her, and who now thanks her champion for saving her. But he warns her that though the man is gone the claim remains. She is safe from all rudeness, but it is still likely that she will lose her Duchy. She confesses that this is no longer all her world, for he has opened to her a new one. But he bids her aspire to rule on true grounds, the humblest rule, resting thus, being worth more than the proudest which can be based on false ones. She promises to maintain or resign her sovereignty

according to his opinion of its justice, and urges him to trust in his own nature and its power of renovating hers. So she presses his hand and leaves him.

Then he exclaims, 'What drew this down on me? She bids all the ardour of youth, which I thought dead, burst into life again before her who needs it. Her hand's print burns on mine. Yet she's so very far above me! All is only too plain. I served her when others fell away, and she rewards me as such souls do. Her change of voice, suffused cheeks, expressive eye, and hand, are all but little of a reward in her generous thoughts, though they are everything to me.—No! I cannot call God's best gift anything but what it is! She loves me! And such a love these papers forbid, perhaps. Can I decide against myself and pronounce her the Duchess, and no mate for me? Cleves, help me! Teach me, you haggard faces,—teach me to endure!'

Before evening he has carefully examined the papers, keeping her image 'almost wholly off,' and repelling to the uttermost the Prince's claims, which, however, he is at last obliged to admit to be so thoroughly just that all men must agree Colombe has not a shadow of right to the rank which has divided them. His rapture is so great that his only doubt is whether he is doing all he can to serve Cleves. He is awaiting Colombe when Berthold comes to him, and scarcely suffers him to announce his decision,

saying that he suspends all claims except that which he, as the future Emperor, now formally makes for the hand of the lady, whom, however, he does not appear really to love.

Valence is left to wonder whether he may go on believing in Colombe's love, or whether his faith has grown so strong, merely because he could not test it, when she enters with, 'My fate, sir? You turn away and all is over. But do not pity me! You may sorrow with me for what I might have been, but never was. Let us rejoice that I am no longer as I have been, and hope that I really am what I seem to myself. This heavy roof seems easy to exchange for the blue sky outside, my lot henceforth.'

'And what a lot is Berthold's, Lady! How he gathers earth's whole good into his arms—stately, strong, and wise—marching on to fortune, and not surprised by her, one great aim, like a guiding-star, lifting his manhood to the height which takes the prize, a prize not so near that he may spring rashly to seize it and overlook the earth, and not so distant as to let him rest contentedly on his path. To him your ducal circlet prophesies the crown imperial, with just the clearness which will evolve his stateliness, strength, and wisdom to perfection, and lead him to the grave at his grandest. So he mounts toward the throne of thrones, feeling each step exultingly, and not overleaping one degree of joy. Each day's suc-

cess adds solid strength to the mystic panoply with which he awes mankind, and life's routine gives him such might that his very shadow is watched, his step becomes a comfort or a portent, and men dread his becoming weak even more than they do his power. Thus he will end as the man of men, the spirit of all flesh, the fiery centre of the world!'

'I have dreamed that such a fortune might arise out of my own,' says the Duchess. 'Above my power seemed to stretch greater potencies. There moved a man whom I approached constantly and yet kept so distant from that I could adore him. I felt the spirit but never saw the face.'

'See it now, Lady. It is Berthold's, Duke now, and Emperor to be. He will let you realize your vision. He offers you his hand.'

'Generous and princely!' she exclaims.

'All this he is.'

'Thanks, Berthold, for my father's sake.'

'Do you accept him?'

'That he should love me!'

'I have not said that he does. If he did this, love might do so much for the world, which is at his feet, that I could scarcely wish you to refuse to the world, and to Cleves, the sacrifice he asks.'

'Not love me, sir?'

'He scarcely affirmed it.'

'May not deeds affirm it?'

'What does he do? True, he saves you all the shame, and thinks he saves all the sorrow, though that may be deeper than you dream. He gives you power to descend gracefully, and neither the world nor you yourself can ever doubt your sincerity if you give up your rule when you are able to keep it and increase it to the utmost of your dreams. This is munificently much.'

'Much! And why is it not love, sir? Answer me!'

'Because not one of his words or looks was that of a lover presenting even a flower to the beloved. Love shows no bold confidence, open superiority, or free pride. Yet this is all I saw in Berthold. Even if reason could find no flaw, a lover's unerring instinct may.'

'You a lover!' exclaims Colombe. 'How strange! I never thought of that. What selfishness! You seemed so much my own, I never dreamed that another might have greater power than mine.'

'Lady, I am wholly yours.'

'Oh, no, no, not mine! It is not the same now, and never more can be. Your first love, doubtless. What is gone from me? What have I lost?'

'My heart replies—No loss there! So back again to the Prince's offer and its obvious magnitude.'

'She is—yes, she must be very fair for you to love her,' persists the Duchess.

'I am merely an advocate of Cleves.'

'You! with the heart and brain which helped me so much that I fancied them all mine, until now I find them subject to a stronger sway! Tell me, is she very fair?'

'Most fair, beyond conception or belief!'

'Black eyes? No matter. Colombe, the world lives without you, whom your friends called the only woman. All the while there was one who never saw your face nor heard your voice, unless—is she of Cleves?'

'Cleves knows her well.'

'Ah, just a fancy! When you poured out your city's wrongs I said—thought rather . . . .'

'You thought of me, Lady?'

'Of what else? There must be some great cause, I thought, for such an effect. See what true love can do! But this is idling. To our work! Admit to the Prince without reserve that my title is unsound. Then may follow . . . . Was she in your mind when you spoke for Cleves so impetuously?'

'All was done for her—and to humble me!'

'But she will be proud when you tell her.'

'That will never be,' sighs Valence.

'How, sir? Is there anything sweeter you can hope to tell her? No. You counselled me. Let me counsel you in the one point I or any woman can. Show her your own worth first, and then speak

of hers. Tell her what you did for her and she did through you. Afterwards the praises of her beauty. Will you?'

'I dare not. She does not suspect that I love her.'

'You jest!'

'The lady is above me and far away from me. Not only her brave form, her bright mind, and her great heart, combine to press me low, but all the world calls rank divides us!'

'Rank!' exclaims the Duchess. 'Here is a man who declares oracularly for others, sees what is true value or false for them, nay, bids them see it too, and they do at once. You called my court's love worthless, and so it is. I threw away all my wealth as dross, and here are you trembling before one or two pieces of it! First, has she seen you?'

'Yes.'

'Then she loves you.'

'One flash of hope burst on me; then night came; and all is now at the darkest. Impossible!'

'We will try. You are still my subject?'

'As ever—to the death!'

'Then obey me. Approach her, and—no; first of all get more confidence. Then say, "My teacher was the daughter of a line of kings, and fair." I will tell you why I say this folly. "She said, that no one among men deserved so much for eloquence, courage,

and the heart they sprang from as did he who saved her at her need. She said this; and what should not the one I love say?"'

'Heaven! O, Lady, this hope! You are filling me with fire.'

'Say this, but do not think I wish you to drop any of your awe and reverence. Make her proud for once to her heart's content, at having all this wealth of mind and soul for her own. Think that you are all this and so obey me.'

'I must.'

'Then kneel to her.'

Valence does so, and she says, 'I dream.'

'Have mercy!' he pleads. 'I have obeyed you; I am yours until death. Despise me and let me die!'

'Alas, sir! must it always turn out thus? Are you like all the world? No! Your service to me was not done in any vulgar and selfish passion. Its real source was loyalty, as you said before. What you spoke just now I consider unsaid again. Your Duchess bids you arise, sir. She wishes to discuss Prince Berthold's claims.'

'I may well rise. I have spoken for Cleves, and I can speak for man. I stood firm then, but I tremble now. When Cleves was starving I laughed at those who dared not speak out the wrongs at which all hearts throbbed. Shall I be mute now, where all hearts speak? O, Lady, for your own sake, look on

what I am, and have, and do, heart and brain, body and soul. I was proud once. I saw you and all sank into nothingness. But if your love should have . . . language fails here—singled me, then be just to it, be generous! Love, if you chose to do so. Here is a clear stage for you to decide the question which has waited so long for you. Is Love or Vanity the best? Solve this for the world's sake. Be the first to say what all will one day shout. Vindicate our earth and be its angel. All is said. Lady, I offer nothing; I am yours. For the sake of the cause look on me and him, and speak!'

'I have received Prince Berthold's message. Tell him that I am preparing my answer,' replies Colombe. But when Valence has left her she says, 'How mournful that nothing is what it calls itself, that faith and loyalty should turn out mere love! And what may Berthold's love be? I was wrong in distrusting the world so soon. The valley-level has its hawks, no doubt. May not the rock-top have its eagles, too?'

As Berthold is waiting for her in her hall that night, he confesses to Melchior that his proposal is not so chivalrous as it might seem. He does not think it wise to let her carry about her wrongs from court to court. If his uncle, the Pope, should be carried off by a coughing fit, and King Philip should take a fancy to blue eyes, her claims would brighten up wondrously, and many a restriction of the Salic law

come to light. Besides the great masquerade must be so nearly over in Europe, that those who are dressed as kings and princes will do well to strengthen themselves as firmly as possible in all their privileges. Melchior asks him, if he cares nothing himself for the lady's blue eyes, and he answers, 'Yes—no! I am past all that now. I might, of course, reason myself into a rapture. Something better has come instead.'

'But even if you have only selfish ends,' urges Melchior, 'you will find it easier to win the lady in the romantic and unselfish way.'

'Then I profess boundless humility,' answers the Prince. 'I might myself speed ill with her, but the Emperor will not. I learned my last lesson when Priscilla, whom I courted under that grey convent-wall, left me for a Brabant duke, whose cheek was as yellow as the topaz on his thumb. I am past all such illusions.'

'From your description of this lady's looks and ways, my prince, I should think it best to warn the Emperor.'

As they are speaking Colombe enters and greets Berthold as one who will be Emperor, saying, 'I am proud of your offer, proud especially that the highest of deeds, that is the most generous, should spring from the highest rank.'

'Lady, you underrate yourself. You are what I must have to be complete.'

'Then you love me, Prince?'

'I revere your lineage, honour your virtue, believe in your truth, do homage to your intellect, and bow before your peerless beauty.'

'But as to love?' she persists.

'What any other love is I do not know. Our best course is to say these hideous truths; for when they have once been said they grow endurable; just as the black water which an earthquake spouts up as a terror soon takes golden and rainbow hues in the sunshine, sleeps in the shadow, and is accepted like the hills and trees. Are you not over-curious in love-lore?'

'I have but recently become so. It seems that I shall best deserve the esteem which is all you in your candour promise me, by asking you on what terms and conditions I am to become your wife?'

'Let me not do myself any injustice, Lady. Because I will not stoop to fictions, it does not follow that my guarded phrase may not include far more of what you wish than all the professions of less scrupulous men. Once for all, you shall be my Empress, the earth's first woman.'

'That—or simple Lady of Ravestein again?' asks Colombe.

'I regret that I have pressed my claims, but now that I have done so I cannot withdraw them. The world looks on. I might set off my offer better, but

I am weary of this place already. My thoughts seek Rome; so I must ask you to decide at once. Take the Empire, or give up your Duchy! Hail to the Empress, or farewell to the Duchess!'

The last four words he speaks so loudly that they are overheard by the courtiers, who have been drawing near, prompted by a suspicion, in which this speech confirms them, and in which even Guibert joins. The attachment of Colombe and Valence for each other is so plain that these selfish schemers suppose that Berthold's visit has been arranged simply in order to give to Valence a chance for playing the champion, and to Colombe an excuse for marrying him as his reward. Accordingly they are expecting that Valence will pronounce Berthold's claim illegal, and that it will then be formally abandoned; and so they suppose that all this has been done, and that the Prince is taking his leave. They hasten to tell him that, by the late Duke's will, the Duchy must become his as soon as the Duchess weds below her rank. And this she is evidently about to do, for Valence has done such deeds in her defence that day, as could be prompted only by love and could be properly rewarded only by marriage. Colombe feels herself obliged to say that, being forced thus to look into herself more closely than she has yet dared to do, she is not sure either that there could be a truer lover than Valence, even as he is painted by his enemies, or that she does not

love him. Berthold, however, bids the courtiers cease their prattle, which is of no use except to inform him how unfit they are to be trusted with secrets, and then says, 'Lady, how should all this affect my purpose? Suppose that you have known some one superior to me in mind or heart, in form or face, I have gifts to balance his. I am nothing. Will you wed the Empire?'

'And my heart elsewhere?'

'Your heart I do not ask for. I do not give any. I shall keep your honour safe, and I will trust you with mine, as the sculptor trusts that marble woman yonder with the rose which lies loose on her hand, but which she will never drop. Why plant seeds which would never yield a blossom? I have no confidence in these men, and no objection to what you say you feel. The time has come for you to write on my summons, either that you, Colombe of Ravestein, admit my claims, or else that you accept my suit.'

Valence, who still holds the summons, is now sent for; and leave to confer privately with him is given by the Prince to Melchior, who keeps warning his patron,

'Will the Empire win? I have read my books to better purpose.'

The scholar knows that Colombe cannot make Berthold happy so long as she loves Valence, and

therefore he wishes to give the latter a trial which will either make him show himself to be unworthy of her, or else will prove him fully worthy in the opinion even of the Prince. Accordingly he tells Valence, that only the report of his claiming her hand as the reward of his services keeps her from accepting Prince Berthold. If the advocate persists in this demand it will probably be granted. So he must balance his own good against hers, and make his decision.

Valence has a sore struggle, but at last he conquers, and offers Berthold and Colombe his congratulations. When the Prince asks him what reward he expects for yielding up his own, he answers:—

'Who thought upon reward? And yet how much
Comes after—oh, what amplest recompense!
Is the knowledge of her, nought? the memory, nought?
—Lady, should such an one have looked on you,
Ne'er wrong yourself so far as quote the world,
And say, love can go unrequited here!
You will have blessed him to his whole life's end—
Low passions hindered, baser cares kept back,
All goodness cherished where you dwelt—and dwell.
What would he have? He holds you—you, both form
And mind, in his,—where self-love makes such room
For love of you, he would not serve you now
The vulgar way,—repulse your enemies,
Win you new realms, or, best, in saving old
Die blissfully—that's past so long ago!
He wishes you no need, thought, care of him—

Your good, by any means, himself unseen,
Away, forgotten !—He gives that life's task up,
As it were . . . . but this charge which I return—
Wishing your good !' *

He gives her the summons, on which she writes a few words, and then says to him, 'Your kindness, sir, deserves some return. On a birthday, like this of mine, gifts are to be thought of, and so they are on a wedding-day, as this is to be also. Ask something of me.'

'He shall have whatever he asks,' says Berthold, 'for your sake and his own.'

Valence is tempted to ask for the withered bunch of flowers she wears, or for one last touch of the hand which he will never see again; but at last he presents his petition with, 'Prince of Cleves, redress her wrongs !'

'I will, sir,' is Berthold's reply.

Valence is now about to retire, but Colombe calls him back, and bids him read what she has written. She has taken him, and given up Juliers, and the world ! It is her birthday !

* *Ibid.* p. 140.

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